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## **Alternative perspectives on school exclusion**

by:

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**Abstract: alternative perspectives on school exclusion**

This thesis explores, from non-standard, alternative perspectives, the subject of the permanent exclusion of children from school, especially avoidable exclusions. I discuss my work as a teacher and educational psychologist, a witness to and actor in this recurring phenomenon. I have considerable experience to draw from. Bearing witness to so many exclusions has proven challenging, bringing with it emotional cost. I cite research that reveals the extent of the school exclusion problem, research that is impotent in terms of promoting much-needed change. In pursuit of reason I go in new directions, exploring the works of four philosophers, using their insights as tools to explore the void between theory and practice, logic and reason; and how we want things to be and the reality of how things are for our most vulnerable children. Permanent exclusion from school is a complex social event the incidence rate of which is obfuscated by the agencies of school, local authority and government. I expose the numbers fiasco, which disguises the magnitude of the problem. The number of children formally excluded is, I argue, massaged downwards, the number informally excluded is concealed. The most vulnerable children are disproportionately affected and their voices rarely heard. We who contribute to these acts of exclusion do so dogmatically, ignorantly and blindly. Our role in the matter remains concealed even from ourselves. This thesis examines that role. Exclusion from school continues with machine-like regularity - something is driving it. To make an emotional connection with the subject matter I use the qualitative tools of personal reflection and fictional stories, the latter using a method inspired by Clough (2002). I address two research questions. I evaluate my study using the criteria suggested by Yardley (2000).

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**acronyms and other forms of writing used in this thesis/1**

**special educational needs**

SEN

*this is a formal recognition of medical, social, behavioural, emotional and/or learning needs some children have, which need to be addressed in order to ensure successful school experiences*

**special educational needs coordinator**

SENCo

*This refers to a teacher or support assistant responsible for identifying and managing support for children's special educational needs*

**Statement of special educational needs**

a Statement

*this is a form of national and local authority recognition that a child has significant SEN requiring intervention and additional funding. It lasts until the child leaves Year 11*

**Education, Health and Care Plan**

an EHC plan

*this is essentially the same as a Statement with some important differences, such as it incorporates more recognition of Health and Care needs and lasts until the age 25 years*

**Key Stage 1, 2, 3 and 4**

KS1, KS2, KS3, KS4

*school children begin school in Reception class and move through National Curriculum Year 1 through Year 11 during compulsory schooling years. Those in Year 10 or 11 are considered to be in KS4 of their education cycle*

**alternative provisions**

APs

*APs are specialist educational colleges that cater for students with SEN or behavioural difficulties educated out of mainstream schools during the KS4 phase of their education.*

## acronyms/2

### **educational psychologist**

psychologist

*the author of this thesis is an educational psychologist. When the term 'psychologist' is used it refers to educational psychologists only and not other types of psychologist*

### **social, emotional and behaviour difficulties**

SEBD

*this term has historic meaning. It refers either to a category of child referral to the educational psychologist or to an intrinsic condition that the child is felt to possess*

### **social, emotional and mental health (difficulties)**

SEMH

*this term now replaces SEBD. It refers either to a category of referral to support services or to an intrinsic condition that the child is felt to possess. The word 'behaviour' has been dropped*

### **Chi-square test**

*this is a test of statistical probability used to measure whether the numbers of events or people or conditions (etc.) that populate each of N groups (usually two groups) occur differently to their numbers predicted according to normal distribution trends*

### **discriminant analysis**

DA

*this tool is like factor analysis producing explanations for data sets that inspire arguments of causal relationships. DA can 'digest' data of almost any type - categorical, interval, ratio, etc. - and come up with 'signpost indicators' of group membership based on statistical probability*

### **fight /flight - pairing - leadership dependency**

baF, baP, baD

*Bion's three basic assumption mentalities are also referred to as baF, baP, baD*

**lists, diagrams and tables****location**

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## **chapter one: introduction**

Bion (1962) notes that: “Failure to eat, drink or breathe properly has disastrous consequences for life itself. Failure to use the emotional experience produces a comparable disaster in the development of the personality” (p.42). Bion suggests that emotion is part of the story of personal learning. In this thesis I use emotion as a form of data. We should not underestimate its impact on our thinking, our decisions, indeed on our lives.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- (i) mission statement
- (ii) why study school exclusion?
- (iii) choices and the library of the mind
- (iv) how this thesis is structured and how the chapters are organised
- (v) what is, and what is not, in this thesis
- (vi) a description of the chosen methodology
- (vii) research questions and the proper unit of study

### **(i) mission statement**

We like to think that we are civilised creatures capable of intelligent, pro-social behaviour. We like to think that the society that we have built over generations of social evolution operates fairly and justly, a place where logic, reason and the gifts of scientific inquiry are applied consistently to the remediation of human problems. We would not like to think the opposite - that we are less civilised than we thought, that our behaviours are predicated by primitive influences and recurring neurotic interludes. We would not like to think that society functions

to persecute the weak or that the institutional behaviour we contribute to is itself occasionally illogical and unnecessarily punitive. We would hate to think that the promise of science has been side-lined, hijacked or purloined for sinister purposes. It would upset us to think that a problem that can be demonstrated to be a social problem was seen as *his* or *her problem only*. By 'his' and 'her' I mean the luckless individual, the excluded child, the *homo sacer* of our modern world of education (Agamben, 1998).

In this thesis I express a degree of dismay that occasionally evolves to outrage. In my daily work I bear witness to a denial of logic that supports a pernicious institutional practice - the practice of permanently excluding children from school, sometimes unjustly so. I have worked as an educational psychologist for twenty years, a teacher for twenty years before that. I am well practiced, rehearsed and informed about the matter of permanent exclusion from school. I know the 'ins and outs' and the 'ups and downs'. I have a strong sense of the white lies, the half-truths, the thunderous silences and the feeble excuses. I know that something is wrong. The words of Marcellus ring true: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Shakespeare, 1599-1602). There is no need to rely on my own experiences or views. Rely on the words of the Children's Commissioner (2014), who examined on behalf of the government and the people of the England, "... the detail of the processes in place for excluding children from state-funded schools in Britain, and the factors which influence schools' decisions to exclude a child" (p.35).

The Commissioner's work provides the numbers of the excluded. It identifies the over-represented groups, i.e. those children with special educational needs, those from ethnic minorities, the preponderance of male pupils; and those whose families exist on low incomes. The Commissioner holds the practice, frequency and pattern of permanent school exclusion to

account by reference to the Equality Act 2010 (HMSO, 2010) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), (UNICEF, 1989). The report finds the system “.. not compliant with the UNCRC” (p.16 of Executive Summary). The report finds that, in some cases, the practice of permanent exclusion is “.. illegal and simply unacceptable” (p.17 of Executive Summary). Evidence was gathered that some “Academies are attempting to avoid scrutiny of their exclusions ..” (p.17 of Executive Summary). And the report identifies “.. confusion over how parents and young people should complain” (p.17 of Executive Summary).

In this thesis I explore the phenomenon of exclusion from firstly familiar and traditional, but later, alternative perspectives. In doing so I attempt to expose the denial of logic and reveal the little-understood motivations that prevail in relation to this issue. I do this for two reasons. The first is that I have a need for therapy - it is difficult to witness and be part of any pernicious social event for such a long time. This thesis might therefore be thought of as an elaborate exercise in constructive sublimation of the type that Klein (1950b, p.199) wrote about. The second reason is that I need to make sense, for myself and other educational psychologists, of the phenomenon itself. At times, when reviewing the research, school exclusion has seemed like a continuing form of madness in modern society, an unusual, repeating pattern of neurotic group behaviour. But at other times, such as when I have been a familiar face in the school, listening to the angst of a suffering senior teacher or Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), I can see little choice other than to exclude. Surely there are lessons to learn, for me and others, in this troubling descant that haunts the music of school life? I return to these important points later.

I should spend a moment to certify my credentials. This thesis is one part of a Doctor of Education programme of study, which I began in 2008 at University of Sheffield. I selected the area of study because it concerned me the most, i.e. school exclusion. In my career I first worked as a teacher in seven schools, four of them special schools. Then I worked as an educational psychologist in seven different local authorities. In those fourteen jobs, which span over a dozen local authorities, private schools and social services departments - and forty years - my work has brought me into close contact with children excluded from school. Somewhere in-between I worked as a research psychologist for a police force in England, where I observed a different face of social exclusion, i.e. adults incarcerated in prisons and police cells. None of those schools or authorities are identified in this thesis.

I confess that, in the course of my work, I have detected a tendency to avoid getting too involved in a case where permanent exclusion is a likely outcome. What does this avoidance behaviour tell me? Why do we avoid the homeless person slumped on the street? Getting too involved can be problematic or stressful. But so can not getting involved - because if we avoid a situation physically do we succeed in avoiding it mentally? And there is an occupational argument. On the level of professional engagement nobody who is being well paid, but whose input is futile, looks credible. But I can testify to another tendency. As a psychologist I have sometimes been punished for being too critical of a school that has aggressively pursued the sanction of permanent exclusion. My summative tendency has been to stay involved for as long as possible. I have learnt that if one chooses to remain distant - and safe - one does not feel, sense or observe the raw emotions that are exposed. And dealing with emotional content is vital for learning. It is not entirely possible for an educational psychologist to work close to this

multifaceted phenomenon of social exclusion and remain unaffected. It is not possible to always sit on the fence. And there are no easy answers.

These are some of the reasons why this thesis moves constantly between published research, personal reflection, narrative account and fictional stories. This thesis also applies perspectives offered by four writers of human anthropology, psychology and philosophy. This thesis does not reduce to a simple algorithm - school exclusion is a difficult subject area to examine objectively and systematically; and it is difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions. In a way, this thesis is a cathartic expression of my personal dismay laced with the glimmer of hope stemming from greater understanding.

## **(ii) why study school exclusion?**

Do we, as educationalists, learn from our experiences in the course of our work? Can we learn directly from the experiences of our colleagues? To what extent do we learn from the children, schools and families in the situations that we encounter in our work, in particular stressful situations? This thesis attempts to address questions such as these. I explore in various ways the institutional practice and social phenomenon of permanently excluding children from school. This practice and its effect on children, its resistance to change and its underlying logic and denial of logic are the focus of this thesis. In this thesis I present the view that permanent exclusion from school is, at times, a pernicious form of social exclusion visited upon vulnerable children for murky reasons. Social exclusion in general has always interested me, possibly due to my life experiences (see chapter two). Consequently I think that this thesis has been growing inside of me for a long time.

In order to exclude a child from school one must first admit the child to a school and insist that he attend. Since most excludees are male I think it will add to the readability of the chapters if I generally use the male pronoun when referring to excluded children. But, of course, the same arguments presumably apply to female pupils who, in recent academic years, accounted for a significant proportion of all children permanently excluded from English schools. The emergence of the norm of compulsory education and the contemporaneous enforcement of school attendance dates back to introduction of compulsory schooling in the late Nineteenth Century in statutes which have confused origins (Stephens, 1998). A significant staging post was provided by the Butler Education Act of 1944 (Elkin, 1944), which, amongst other things, provided an organisational justification to remove disruptive children from school. The rationale and justification for school exclusion continued to evolve. From Harris *et al* (2000) we learn:

“The Education (No. 2) Act 1986 (Section 22(f)) was the first to confer a statutory authority to exclude .. This power was subsequently incorporated into the Education Act 1996 .. and is now found (without the references to articles of government, which have been abolished) in section 64 of the SSFA 1998 .. ” (p.82, author’s use of brackets, SSFA refers to School Standards Framework Act).

This thesis focuses on English schools only and I am unable, due to its focus, consider a comparison with other countries. This thesis focuses particularly on avoidable exclusions - presumably a number permanent exclusions from school are necessary? We can presume that exclusion is done for reasons, some clear, some not. I realised quite early in my research that it is difficult to apply an adequate definition of what school exclusion really means but in chapter

three I attempt this. Beyond the matter of definition, it is near impossible to collect reliable statistics about the numbers children excluded even in the many local authorities where I have worked as an educational psychologist. As will be seen, the numbers provided locally and nationally are suspect. Reliable or not, numbers tell one sort of story and the personal experience of the excluded child himself tells another. So how should this particular phenomenon best be observed, studied and discussed? Should it be observed at all? What are the important research questions? What is the appropriate methodology that will permit a meaningful study of this particular form of social exclusion? To echo Vygotsky, I ask: what is “.. the proper unit of study for understanding this uniquely human activity?” (Newman and Holzman, 2014, p.62). What form will my data take beyond the vector of emotional effect mentioned in the paragraph above? What is the nature of the epistemology that this enterprise of 'finding out', 'knowing' and hopefully 'improving the situation' will be built upon? There are no easy answers to any of these questions. So why should this phenomenon be studied? My answer is this: all persistent and pernicious acts of social exclusion should be properly held to account by those responsible for making such acts an institutional reality. I find myself with valid experiences to report on and, for a brief time, in a place from which I can speak.

### **(iii) choices and the library of the mind**

Choices, choices, choices. In the first 2000 words or so of this introduction I have already made a number of choices without having justified or explained them. I will highlight three of them:

(i) I imply that I have learned from my experiences - but have I? - the reader might judge for themselves; (ii) I have already described school exclusion as 'sometimes pernicious' – so have I already made up my mind on the matter? I wonder exactly how many permanent exclusions fit



this bill? And (iii) I have stated that this thesis is about children who are permanently excluded from school. But is it? I have not interviewed any child or parent about exclusion. Is this thesis about something else, something that lies hidden from me at the outset of this project? There will be other choices that I have already made that I cannot see so clearly at this point. So I have a need to be systematic in what I am setting forward as arguments, thoughts, personal reflections and narrative stories. In choosing what needs to be put 'in' the thesis I inevitably choose what to leave 'out'. I have made choices. I have struggled to keep this thesis a manageable length.

This thesis has eight chapters, the first being this introduction. This introduction might be thought of as the entrance foyer leading to a regular hexagonally-shaped library. I invite the reader to imagine that the chapters in this thesis are represented by the rooms inside that library, places where knowledge lies and where learning takes place. I would ask the reader to visualise this building as comprising six main antechambers, each leading to the central library room. Including the entrance foyer this makes eight rooms in all. The idea for this visual imagery comes from a phrase used by Mithen (1998), “the mind as a cathedral” (p.70). Imagine that I, the researcher, inhabit this library. I came in through the foyer, walked the corridors and visited its various antechambers for quite a few years. In this library I studied school exclusion and other forms of social exclusion. I have read books that focus on aspects of social anthropology and many research articles focussing on school exclusion, social exclusion and related areas. I have taken inspiration from the writings of Bion (1961), Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009), Dawkins (1976, 2007) and Jaynes (1976) and used their thoughts to reflect upon the social phenomenon of school exclusion. These studies have led me to reflect upon the

nature of people, the decisions that people feel that they make, their behaviour; and, indeed, on the vital matters of authorisation, consciousness and identity. It is in these antechambers that I have conducted my thought experiments. In the discussion section of this thesis I explore the matters arising. It is in the central room of my private library where I have written up my research.

Why does this library have eight antechambers and not four? Or forty-four for that matter? I copied a design used by Billington (2000), who used the works of prominent writers, including Bion (1962, 1970), Foucault (1967, 1977), Lacan (1972) and Marx (1844, 1857-1858), to reflect on similar subject matter, i.e. society's penchant to identify, separate and exclude children from school. Applying methodological precedence I loosely based my approach on Billington (*ibid*) and this more or less limits my consideration to four primary theorists. For the work of each theorist I provide a brief critique and in the discussion section I examine further why I chose the writers that I did.

There are differences between what I have written and what others have written. For some reason – and uncovering this reason was part of my thesis journey - I found growing discomfort relying on the ‘familiar and traditional’ epistemologies that underpin most research into school exclusion. I provide a definition of the terms ‘familiar and traditional’ later. The discomfort I refer to here did not apply to Billington (*ibid*). Rather, it applied to forms of research that rely on mainly quantitative methodology and a narrow view of what education, children and school exclusion are. I discuss these things in more detail in chapter three.

For a time, one or two years in fact, I became stuck and my thesis-writing stopped. Then, following an unusual inspiration from a book by Dawkins (2007), I gained the courage to discard old, familiar and comforting 'ways of knowing' and entertain new ones. I explored and made use of the theories of Bion, Darwin and Jaynes. What did I think these philosophers have in common? In their own unique way they were all explorers and I felt like an explorer too. I matched their theories against my thoughts about the nature of people, the system of education in England and the phenomenon of permanent school exclusion. It was something that I wanted and needed to do. I constructed a new, perhaps artificial, yet systematically-applied, philosophical framework to build a thesis argument on. But I needed mortar to hold my construction together. An obvious solution was to rely upon personal experience. But I could not realistically contact any formerly-excluded child or their parent. So I decided to recount some of my experiences in my work as teacher and educational psychologist. I also constructed fictional stories to represent the situations of vulnerable children caught up in the madness of school exclusion. In doing so I swapped one set of ethical concerns for another. In this thesis I have represented the lives of excluded children *in general* by writing about fictional characters. modelling on an approach described by Clough (2002). My hope is that the fictional stories will stir the minds of educational psychologists and other professionals. In this way my exploration might become their exploration. Perhaps I can help my colleagues in their work if I can take them to the places similar to where I have been? At the very least, my approach and the application of theories from very different fields of philosophy should make an interesting journey for the reader.

**(iv) how this thesis is structured and how the chapters are organised**

Most theses have a familiar structure where a concern leads the writer to read around the subject matter. This is then reflected in a literature review. From there research questions emerge. To explore them the writer provides a general investigative approach and a justification for tackling the matter in the particular way he has decided to. From this general approach a specific methodology is chosen that fits with the study. The study then involves investigation, experiment, further reading, personal reflection, peer review, etc. This whole process is reviewed in the discussion section of the thesis with comments about the process of study, the new questions raised, sources of errors and omissions, avenues for future study, etc. My thesis evolved differently and its structure is different, as I will describe. I have used a non-traditional format to explore a vague territory of human experience - the void between theory and practice, logic and reason; and how things really are versus how we would like them to be.

In this thesis I cover a lot of ground – arguably too much ground but it all seems too relevant to dismiss. In chapter two I write about myself, my upbringing, my education, my work with children; and my long-standing interest in school exclusion. I have done this because, no doubt buried in my choices, lie data, information and unconscious prejudices that the reader will detect better than I can. Chapter two speaks to the issues of personal identity, personal experience and how I construct the phenomenology of my own social world - a phrase that I borrowed from Schutz ([1932] 1972).

In chapter three I look at school exclusion from ‘familiar and traditional’ perspectives of modern social science. Later in this chapter and in chapter three I define these terms, after which I drop the inverted commas. I cite research articles that focus on school exclusion.

Chapter three is concerned with my search for accurate numbers of the children excluded from school over time, in local authorities in England. I have searched for patterns in this recurring social behaviour. The premium of writing space precludes me from investigating in any depth other things, such as the reasons why children are excluded from school, what their personal experiences were; and the long-term consequences of their permanent exclusion from school. Other writers have covered these matters more thoroughly. Of note, in respect of the latter, I cite Berridge *et al* (2001). I try to explain my personal view, which is that our reliance upon epistemologies and methodologies that so clearly reveal the pernicious act of social exclusion is itself useless if it cannot help us to change and improve the situation. Chapter three examines the issue of quantitative versus qualitative methodology but does not fully explore this important methodological split, which others have covered more adequately (Todd *et al*, 2004). After challenging our over-reliance on 'familiar and traditional' 'ways of knowing' I then pursue, in subsequent chapters, a new, exploratory route. This is a qualitative, exploratory and narrative line of inquiry laced with the emotion, turmoil and confusion wrapped up in fictional stories.

In chapters four, five, six and seven I examine the works of four very different philosophers, using their insights as tools to explore new and alternative ways of thinking about school exclusion. Returning to my analogy of the library building, the general décor of these four anterooms is remarkably the same. In each chapter I attempt to stir emotional effect by deploying a fictional story of a child at risk of exclusion or actually excluded or persuaded to 'move on'. I then apply an injection of theory from a primary theoretical source, i.e. Darwin ([1859] 1985), ([1874] 2009); Dawkins, (1976, 1997, 2007); Bion (1961, 1962, 1970); and Jaynes

(1976), in that order. I add personal reflection and ask questions about human behaviour in general and in relation to school exclusion in particular. I now say a little more about these four.

In chapter four I describe the works of the widely-acclaimed natural scientist, Charles Darwin, using two sources, Darwin ([1859] 1985) and ([1874] 2009). Darwin discusses humankind and what forces act to influence our behaviour, a subject often in my thoughts. The issues of morality, social justice and human purpose are opened up to a Darwinian perspective. I apply lessons and metaphors from his theories of evolution to the phenomenon of school exclusion. This application proved tenuous and this left me stuck and I spent some years wandering the corridors of my metaphorical library. One of those corridors might well be called *the corridor devoted to the study of pernicious acts of human exclusion*. The time I spent there may have been a distraction from the formulation of this thesis but perhaps it was a necessary one? In that corridor I read Agamben (1995), Foucault (1967), MacIntyre (2007), Sampson (1962), Sereny (1995) and Žižek (2002) because I thought I should. Perhaps I just needed to? When writing a thesis, it can be difficult to retain a sharp focus on one's line of inquiry.

In a dissentient moment I alighted upon the work of Dawkins (2007). This source re-invigorated me because Dawkins writes with fluency, confidence and enthusiasm. He questions anything and everything in a self-assured way - without, perhaps, questioning himself and his own philosophical position too much. In chapter five I apply Dawkins' ideas to my study of school exclusion as a way of unlocking my thoughts. Thus I examine the social phenomenon of school exclusion using the tools of game theory, religious belief and the influence of memes on our use of written and spoken language. This chapter speaks candidly to the issue of postmodern inquiry, although I cannot do justice to Lyotard (1984), from whom the phrase has its origins.

The important issues of knowledge, power and how children are represented are touched upon but I do not claim to match up to the philosophical insights of Billington (2000), Foucault (1982) and Hall (1997). One or two readers of the early drafts of this thesis have commented on my choice of Bion, Darwin, Dawkins and Jaynes. Like Darwin and Jaynes, Dawkins is male and white; and, like these two, he describes things with certainty and exactitude. Some would categorise all three as positivists. Bion (1961, 1962) is different. I include Dawkins in this study simply because his work was part of the journey I undertook when formulating this thesis.

In chapter six I stride with enthusiasm into the anteroom devoted to the seminal work of Bion (1961) who discusses human behaviour in the group context from a unique, neo-Freudian perspective. I describe the relevance of his work to my own work as an educational psychologist involved, mainly at the casework level but also at the strategic level, in the matter of school exclusion. I apply Bion's ideas to the progress of a team meeting of psychiatrists working in a mental hospital where the subject of discussion is unusual patient behaviour. This particular fiction as close as I dare get to demonstrating a Bionesque interpretation of the professional interactions of a team of educational psychologists. This chapter is the first of two (i.e. also chapter seven), which explores matters of where our authorisation to act comes from, why we do what we do; and do we decide at all? If the reader only reads one chapter of this thesis, I hope that it is this one.

In chapter seven I cover a unique work by Jaynes (1976). This adds a new and alternative insight into the study of school exclusion. Jaynes should be described as a philosophical maverick. His work is largely unknown for reasons given in the chapter. He is fundamentally concerned with how human beings derive their external authorisation and their internal self-authorisation to

act in a given way in a given social context. I select a number of ideas from Jaynes and apply them to the social phenomenon of permanent school exclusion. One of the most important of these is the general bicameral paradigm (this thesis, ch7iv), which I have applied to a fictional story of a child who was persuaded to transfer to a different high school. I have applied Jaynes' idea to the murky process of decision-making at the local authority level when permanent exclusion is authorised. This chapter speaks to the issues of self-determination, free will and social justice. In this chapter I mention Hume (1739, 1740) although Jaynes himself does not explore the rich philosophical history surrounding the perennial social issues that he raises in his unique work.

For the final chapter I return to the central library room and write my discussion. Here I critique my central arguments. I attempt to answer some of the questions raised in earlier chapters. I extract the lessons of my learning and I attempt to explicate these for the benefit of my fellow educational psychologists. I provide answers to my research questions. I suggest some avenues for further research. I close with - you probably guessed it - one final fiction in the guise of a metaphorical finale.

I have listed the contents of each chapter at its beginning. Then I present the main argument covered in that chapter. I begin each chapter (after chapter two) by recounting a fictional story. Chapter two presents a story of Howard, the story and the character being real not fictional. In general I have written a fictional story that fits with the theme of the chapter. A lot of the data used in this thesis is necessarily of a narrative type, which have their origins in personal experiences, perceptions and reflections. I can make no apology if some of my perceptions seem very different from what readers might expect. At the end of each chapter I have



summarized the chapter contents. In the discussion I attempt to evaluate what I have written before bringing the thesis to a conclusion.

**(v) what is, and what is not, in this thesis**

I have highlighted the disconnect between the institutional processes that lead to permanent school exclusion and the inability of almost every professional, study or authority to research, describe, challenge or critique the phenomenon in a way that changes the outcome for the most vulnerable children who are avoidably excluded. This is a central argument of this thesis. Children in England in the early part of the Twenty First Century are being permanently excluded from school at a regular and possibly increasing rate – we cannot know as long as accurate numbers are withheld, not collated or are massaged downwards. As an educational psychologist who has often been closely involved in the matter of school exclusion, I have been witness to what now seems like a process of serial unreason. Sometimes it has been difficult to even talk about the subject, especially to my colleagues. In the matter of school exclusion the educational psychologist in England is ineffectual within a social system that excludes children with machine-like regularity. I figure amongst the ineffectual majority.

The children and parents who stand as characters in the fictional stories in this thesis are English, English nationals or recent immigrants to England. The characters are either 'he' or 'she', according to the story. Unless otherwise indicated, children in general are referred to as 'him', 'his' or 'he', to reflect the fact that most children being referred to educational psychologists are male. In this thesis the educational psychologists, either fictitious or real, are female, to reflect their numerical dominance in the profession, unless I am referring to myself. The schools and local authorities are not identified because the messages that this thesis carry

are not directed at particular schools or any one local authority. Occasionally I cite research from other countries and this should be clear from the reference given.

The general situation in English schools regarding permanent school exclusion is more complex than I am able to write about here. The negative features of this practice that I highlight apply to many local authorities. This thesis does not have, as its focus, a full examination of the relationships between society, vulnerable individuals and those who wield power; but the reader will detect that I am drawn to those issues. This thesis is not an attempt at moral catharsis because I have rarely been 'the main person' involved in any particular school exclusion. Usually my role in work has been peripheral, giving advice. But sometimes I have worked very close to the main characters, including the children excluded and their families. My feeling - that I have sometimes been helpful - cannot be proved - my membership of the 'ineffectual majority' remains far easier to demonstrate. I admit to being proud of my work and my stance with children at risk of exclusion from school - perhaps I am still fooling myself? This thesis does not identify specific children. This thesis is only initially concerned with numerical data and research that relies upon it. Having demonstrated my deep suspicions about the various forms of inquiry and the research that rely upon it, I move quickly to alternative lines of inquiry. I use the word 'murky' (this thesis, ch1ii) after careful consideration. Things that are murky are distasteful, they lie concealed and around them an occluding mist gathers. My impression is that the decision-making processes that underpin permanent exclusions from school are murky. With these considerations in mind this thesis has proved challenging to write.

**(vi) a description of the chosen methodology**

“The chief characteristic of the specifically human life ... is that it is always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story ... ” (Arendt, 1958, p 72, quoted in Billington, 2006, p.129)

I wanted to write about my experience of working with children at risk of exclusion or actually excluded. But it would have been almost impossible to gain their permission to represent the important details of their situations. I wanted to convey the thought experiments that I have undertaken, my distillation of ideas taken from the four primary theorists that I selected. But none of those four philosophers bent their theories to the matter of school exclusion. I wanted to explain my experiences as a teacher and educational psychologist involved with excluded children and my thoughts and my feelings about this problematic area of school life. But I did not want to bore the reader or write something acceptable but irrelevant. So I came up with a menu of sorts that I argue serves as a credible methodological approach to match the complex task that I have undertaken.

The methodology can be considered to be a case study where me, my life and my work represent the case to be studied. I wanted to write about *things out there* that I have experienced but also about *things in here* that have happened for me. To do this I have moved between published research, recounting personal work experience - some of it painful - fictional stories and extensive personal reflection. These are the main forms of inquiry that I rely upon. I have done this partly because I lack skill in dancing the dance of philosophical inquiry. My experiences are important to me and, who knows, perhaps they are important to other educational psychologists also? In using narrative methods I am attempting to make sense of the phenomenon of school exclusion for myself and hopefully for others. I also want to understand my own past and present involvement in school exclusion. And I want to make

sense of the research that I have read and my growing frustration with it. I sense a crisis of social justice and through this thesis I have found a way to represent my concerns. I suspect that, although I can divine some important research questions, I cannot answer them adequately. I need to say a bit more about these forms of inquiry, beginning with my frustration with what I call 'familiar and traditional' methods of social inquiry.

During the years that this thesis has evolved, or rather settled, I have read a great deal about school exclusion. Most of the research is located in a well-visited anteroom of some other library, i.e. a place far distant from my own library - but I began my journey there. This far-away place was devoted to epistemological and methodological inquiry of a certain type. In this thesis I have referred to such forms of inquiry as 'familiar and traditional', about which I should now say a little more. They bespeak an over-reliance on quantitative methodology, statistical inference and theory-building based on a nomothetic view of human beings. Most research I have read - and written (Forde, 1977, 1987, 1997) - seem to fit within this familiar and traditional framework. I find this type of epistemology lacking in a vital respects when its focus is social exclusion. Sometimes I find myself wondering whether I am studying school exclusion *or* the limitations of social scientific inquiry itself. Danziger (1985) writes about this:

“The issue is one of the relation between psychological theory and the rules of evidence. Three commonly held beliefs affecting this issue appear to be ripe for revision: (1) that statistical inference provides the only valid procedure for relating data and theory; (2) that the rules about what constitutes valid evidence are independent of theory and are fixed forever; (3) that the structure of theory must be accommodated to the structure of methodology and not vice versa” (p.13)

But this thesis is not all about narrative versus numerical or qualitative versus quantitative methodologies - there is an immanent influence at work in this thesis. This is because / am the author of the words written herein. More than one university tutor have observed about my thinking, in relation to how I express my thoughts about my work as an educational psychologist, a hint of inconsequentiality. I understand this to mean that I project rejection and doubt about the limitations of Cartesian logic in terms of cause and effect, about which others have written far more eloquently than I am capable of, for example, Manley (2010). Other tutors, perhaps puzzled by my philosophical stance - one tutor called it a 'creative disconnectivity' - have wondered whether or not I am a deconstructionist by default. I feel a need to make these confessions because I am sure that in some way these tutors are correct in their observations; and, sooner or later, the reader of this thesis will detect these permeating influences in what I have written.

What else might the reader detect? What are my doubts? I question belief that each of us is a separate individual with a unique identity, a *one* who seamlessly subdivides into a social being and a private being. I question that each of us is a different person from all other people - that our genetic stings are as distinct and as unique as our fingerprints. Are we really conscious of ourselves as individuals and of other people as similar but different? Or is this just a metaphorical trick that we play upon ourselves? And is it true that each of us can *choose to act* in certain ways? Another belief I question is that our decision-making takes place inside our brain in a neural laboratory of the sort described in memorable ways by Kelly (1955) and Young ([1950] 1956); and more recently by Damasio (1999). Do we really make our decisions independently, based on learning, persuasion and sometimes lies? We believe that our

decisions are almost always rational, logical and consistent with our individual life, our individual experiences. But beyond *self*, is there such a thing as time which moves, as we understand it, in a forward direction, like a tide, and we are inevitably carried along with it? If there is, does time diminish the spectacle of social exclusion? In choosing to act or not act (to exclude to not exclude) is the arrow of time always implicated? Do the things done today cause the things that occur tomorrow? Supposedly, in-between all of these is *self*, *I*, *me* and *my* decisions. A would-be educational psychologist would not be offered professional training if his words in interview sounded different from this. Fast-tracking to chapters six and seven of this thesis I will show that Bion (1961) and Jaynes (1976) describe different sorts of inconsequential and mysterious worlds in which humans in groups behave rather differently.

A thesis marks a journey and as my journey came to an end I found other theoretical sources that resonate strongly with some of the themes that I have tried to develop. I discuss this matter further in the discussion. But one quote by one of those philosophers, who deserved greater mention than I am able to deliver, is by Gergen (2009). He echoes in a more eloquent way what I have attempted to convey in the above paragraph:

“.. the view of the individual as singular and separate, one whose abilities to think and feel are central to life, and whose capacity for voluntary action is prized, is of recent origin. It is a conception of human nature that took root only four centuries ago, during a period that we now view as the Enlightenment” (p.xiv).

But do not stop reading yet! I, too, rely on commonly-held beliefs, practices and tools of modern inquiry as my limited research contribution list shows (Forde, 1977, 1987, 1997), although perhaps not in the same way that the reader might. To me they are convenient and

widely-accepted tools of thinking. But I can visualize an epistemological world in which these things are not quite so clear cut or valid. Like Bion (*ibid*) and Jaynes (*ibid*) attempt, It is important not to dismiss alternative epistemological worlds because the worlds that ‘familiar and traditional’ tools of inquiry reveal also reveal intractable problems, for individuals and society itself. The methods of social science that we tend to rely on often leave us feeling very uneasy about our work. They offer description but little insight into the messy world of human activity. They offer only weak solutions to perennial human problems. If we rely only on the tried, tested and failed forms of inquiry then the structural and the systemic will remain the same despite the findings of studies. The *status quo* will remain and social exclusion in its many guises will continue unabated. As will be seen, having found one or two fascinating and alternative epistemologies, I struggle to find ways to methodologically activate them.

This thesis attempts an unorthodox methodology. I am exploring something difficult to pin down using alternative ways of knowing. Using a narrative style and writing fictional stories I am telling the story of school exclusion in the way that I see it, the way that I experienced it as a teacher and psychologist. I am recounting experiences from my own work and identifying lessons that I have learnt that might help my fellow educational psychologists in their work. In using an unorthodox methodology, which some have called postmodern (Denzin, 1997), I am attempting to reveal feelings - my own and other peoples’ - which were intricately associated with the situations I encountered during my work. As Bion (see quote, this thesis, ch6) noted, it is vital to make use of emotional experience. I am trying to capture experiences, my own and that of other people. In doing this, questions of ethics emerge: how can I represent other people - especially vulnerable children - justly, fairly and properly? Is it good enough for me to

avoid *their* own accounts, *their* stories and *their* learning? Is it fair to intuit *their* emotions?

Certainly I cannot recall ever asking a child who was excluded how he felt about it just like I never asked a person who slipped on a banana skin how they felt about that experience. I never asked a parent of a child that I was working with whether I could use their child's exclusion experience as data for my study. Perhaps I should have? But which ones would I have selected? So I decided not to. I might have done if I had thought that I could do it well enough and if it would do the children any good.

There came a point when I asked myself how could I ethically represent the children I have encountered who were at risk of permanent exclusion or who had been excluded? A permanent exclusion from school is stressful, sometimes traumatic for the child excluded and for his family. How could I return, after so much time had passed, to a child, to his family, to his local authority and seek permission to dig up those old, painful memories? I could not and yet the stories of those children live on inside of me and inside of others. They deserve to be told. I came across the method of fictional stories in Clough (*ibid*), who offers this guidance:

“.. stories can provide a means by which those truths, which cannot otherwise be told, are uncovered. The fictionalisation of educational experiences offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protections of anonymity to the research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings” (p.8).

It is important to preserve the anonymity of children, parents, teachers and local authorities and I have done this. I ask the reader to accept my narrative accounts of fictional children as my own way of faithfully representing *my* experiences, *my* thought processes and *my* feelings at



the confusing and stressful times in my career working with children who have either been excluded or who faced that prospect. Below I add some detail about how I used Clough's postmodern approach to write fictional stories and the precautions that I took to ensure that my stories do not become conflated with real children in real schools in real local authorities.

I have constructed five fictional stories and matched them to the chapters in the thesis they seemed best suited to. I used memory traces from real cases that I had been involved with throughout my career in education. I changed and combined different aspects to construct fictional stories. No fictional story is the story of an actual child. I omitted or changed key variables so that the characters, schools and local authorities could not be identified or misidentified. I changed the biographical indicators of key characters. I kept the gender of the psychologist involved female. I used both male and female child characters in the stories. I sought to make each story relevant, believable and representative of a human experience that I had observed in the course of my work. In all the stories I sought to describe a human situation from the child's perspective. I concede that, whereas these stories of child exclusion from school are emotive and moving, they only apply to a very small proportion of children in English schools. Most children's school experiences are not experiences of exclusion - although I imagine they witness it.

Fictional stories are powerful but if they stray too far from real life they become incredible or meaningless. It is part of my craft to present stories that are meaningful, cohesive and believable. They are intended to focus the mind of the reader. But the other extreme also pertains: if the stories are too real there is the risk of real or imagined identification associated with them. The fictional story that captures the intensity of feeling, the essence of doubt and

the pain of that crucial meeting in school might be *too* familiar to a real child, parent or professional who stumbles across it. I have read, re-read and adjusted my fictional stories with these dangers in mind. Even still, the risk of false identification is ever-present. The story of John is so general in nature that it could apply to a hundred 'Johns' up and down the country in any academic year. But does this make the likelihood of mis-identification with John one hundred times better or one hundred times worse? Clough provides other notes of caution, quoting Richardson (1994): "desires to speak for others are suspect" (p.525). So in my stories I have focussed on procedural aspects of case involvement, not least because this thesis is about procedural aspects and the wider social ramifications of permanent school exclusion. However, it remains important to communicate the underlying emotions. I have attempted to do both.

The risks incurred by representing the life stories of real children are acute, as Billington (2006) makes clear. The risks in writing about any child who is experiencing significant social exclusion, personal hurt and possibly trauma are also acute. In my daily work as an educational psychologist I have tried to follow the old adage, 'above all else do no harm'. Actually, these words were given to me by the very first principal educational psychologist I had the privilege to work with. I have applied the words case by case. I have applied them in writing fictional stories. I have applied the 'Lolly test', as I now explain.

Clough wrote a fictional story about a child called Molly, with whom he was involved on a professional basis. The brief story-line below highlights the dangers of fiction-writing that too accurately matches with real case features. Clough's case involvement (as educational psychologist) with Molly proved unsuccessful. In the story Molly died in tragic circumstances two years after case contact had closed. Clough then fast-forwards to the day when Lolly, the

fictional brother of Molly, arrives at the office to confront Dr Clough with ‘the truth’ that Clough he had constructed about Molly. Lolly is clearly angry and he reads aloud extracts from Dr Clough’s fictional story, in particular the part where Dr Clough describes the moustache that Molly’s (and Lolly’s) mother has. Having read the extract, Lolly speaks:

Lolly: “Do you have a mother, *Doctor* Clough?”

Lolly: “Does your mother have a moustache, *Doctor* Clough?”

There is a pregnant pause before Lolly speaks again:

Lolly: “You killed that boy ..”

Clough: “Look. Can we sort this out? Can we ..?”

Clough: “Lolly, what do you want?”

Lolly: “Nothing .. Nothing”.

(Clough, 2002, pp. 54-59. The above is an accurate, albeit much-shortened, extract from the original text. The words in italic are from the original source).

I have intentionally kept the quote brief. Clough manages to activate in the mind of any would-be fictional story-writer the very real danger of representing a child in crisis, a child who might recognise himself at some future date. Clough’s story of Lolly is fictional, as are my stories. I have re-read all my stories with Lolly in mind. I have applied what I have called the ‘Lolly test’. I used my judgement to determine whether any future ‘Lolly’ could possibly confronted me with a graphic representation/misrepresentation of themselves, their family members or their school situation that they had found in my fictional stories. The risks of writing fictional stories remain. The risks of not representing the plight of children caught up the school exclusion

machine also remain. What tips the balance? For me it was that nothing seems to be changing for vulnerable children caught up in the school exclusion machine.

My fictional stories are a form of post-modern inquiry. They are not important to the pursuit of ethnographic exactitude. They are important because they speak of a truth, they make a representation that is important to me and hopefully to the reader. How I write the stories is one thing - how others read them and what they take from them is another. I close with a quote from Sandelowski cited by Clough (*ibid*, p.18):

“When you talk with me about my research, do not ask me what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data. But know that in asking you to ask me this, I am not confessing to telling any lies about people or events in my studies/stories. I have told the truth. The proof is in the things I have made - how they look to your mind’s eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe the, and whether they appeal to your heart”.

Sandelowski (1994, p.121).

I would ask the reader to read my fictional stories and ask themselves, “Does this story remind me of anything similar that I have encountered?”

#### **(vii) research questions and the proper unit of study**

To adequately challenge the systems that result in children facing social exclusion from our schools and our society is my purpose. To change those systems is a goal that might not be achieved. As Kingsmill (1944), quoting Samuel Johnson two centuries earlier, noted: “We will not endeavour to fix the destiny of kingdoms: it is our business to consider what beings like us

may perform” (p.7). But, at the very least, those systems that operate around us, that operate on our behalf, should be better understood. Especially when it can be easily demonstrated that those systems - such as those that lead to avoidable permanent school exclusions - deliver social injustice with machine-like regularity and require urgent modification. In this thesis I apply lessons from lesser-known, indeed alternative sources to this age-old problem. I cannot guarantee that these alternative forms of knowing and seeing will change outcomes for the children made vulnerable by being excluded from school. But if they change things for the professionals involved then that is a step in the right direction. My research questions are:

***research question 1***

*Can I demonstrate that ‘familiar and traditional’ forms of social science inquiry, when applied to the phenomenon of school exclusion, are largely ineffective in promoting systemic change; and that other forms of inquiry, based on less-orthodox ‘ways of knowing’, offer inspiration and value to the educational psychologist involved with children at risk of exclusion.*

***research question 2***

*Can I demonstrate that I have learnt from my experience as an educational psychologist working with and studying children at risk of permanent exclusion from school; and make key lessons that I have learnt available to other educational psychologists?*

This thesis might be thought of as a non-traditional experiment designed to answer the two questions. But what is the proper unit of study that this experiment identifies? - a question, originally attributed to Vygotsky (Newman and Holzman, 2014), for every thesis. One unit is the nature of experience, the emotional consequence for the educational psychologist who is

involved with, or who witnesses, a child facing permanent exclusion from school. In this thesis emotion is used as data but it is difficult data to extract and employ. It is also difficult data to forget. For example, the fictional story of Adam, in chapter three, produces powerful emotional effect - perhaps as much as Clough's story about Molly. Adam's story is *intended* to trigger memories and associated feelings in fellow educational psychologists. But, of course, I cannot know what effect my fictional story will have. The resolution of emotion is necessary for learning to take place but sometimes it is a barrier to learning. This is a difficulty with using emotion as data in a qualitative study. Unable to 'measure' it, its effect and its nature, I necessarily find other ways to make use of it. Emotion may be posited as an entity represented in the educational psychologist's personal, metaphorical mind-space. My use of the term, metaphorical mind-space, derives from the work of Jaynes (*ibid*, p.46). I will explain the term mind-space briefly as it applies to the work of the educational psychologist.

In work with children at risk of permanent exclusion from school the psychologist may find herself in one of many difficult situations. In each she must first recognise, then come to terms with, her own emotions. Such learning takes time to assimilate. But having done this she will have more capacity to appreciate the uncertain human terrain she is both traversing and part of. This terrain includes the misplaced value in words, the puzzling dynamics of people interactions, the unexpected display of raw emotion; and the uneasy doubt all around. Jaynes visualises this as growth in the mental representation of the elements of conscious being through an expansion of metaphorical mind-space. Having decided to allocate suitable words, sufficient mind-space and accurate identity to the entity of emotion (and other things), the psychologist finds herself better able to deal with the conversation, the decisions and the little-

understood behaviour that she encounters. In this metaphorical mind-space, the educational psychologist will recognise her own emotional reactions and intuit the emotions of the other people also. Through this personalised form of learning from experience, the educational psychologist will find herself better placed to help the other people who are experiencing their own stressful situations. The psychologist will be better prepared to work on behalf of the child facing permanent exclusion from school.

## chapter two: myself in this study

“The (Alternative Provision) system was created in this local authority in the mid-90s to deliver a necessary service. Not all KS4 students have the skills to cope in high school.

The system acts as a safety valve, permitting the necessary removal of disruptive students away from the high school and into educational settings more appropriate to their needs” (The words of one senior appointee to the Alternative Provision placement panel in one local authority where I was once employed).

The words ‘Alternative Provision’ are used hereafter in this thesis to refer to the various systems in place local authorities in England that offer more practical-based learning experiences for KS4 children who are otherwise considered ‘disruptive’ in mainstream high school.

In writing this chapter I drew inspiration from an author of fiction books, whom I listened to on TV talking about his early life experiences growing up in Australia in the 1950s (Hay Festival: *Talking books, Martha Kearney talks to author Peter Carey*, BBC1, 18 June 2016) . Describing himself as an 'outsider', Peter Carey found a critical position from which to write his best-selling novels. He told his audience that he grew up feeling that he did not fit in properly anywhere. Like Carey, I have been an outsider at regular intervals in my life and throughout my career in education. In writing this chapter I apply two rules. First, the reader needs to know how my life experiences have shaped my views on myself, society, schools, children and the subject of school exclusion. Secondly, the reader needs to know about my background and what led me to



question the limitations of the 'familiar and traditional' epistemologies that often underpin studies of problematic social phenomena, school exclusion being one of these.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- (i) a story about Howard
- (ii) being a member of a large, Catholic immigrant family
- (iii) being an outsider
- (iv) a fascination with science
- (v) a passion for social justice
- (vi) the permission to read
- (vii) a place from which to speak
- (viii) summary of this chapter

**(i) a story about Howard**

Howard was a newcomer to a Social Services-run residential home and special school that I worked in early in my teaching career in the 1980s in Hampshire. He was not a student but the headteacher. Removing children (described in the job specification as 'delinquent') from their homes for social reasons in order to protect them and educate them in residential special schools was common practice at that time although under national review (DHSS, 1981). As such, children arrived at the residential home without warning, sometimes in the middle of the night. Their paperwork followed later. In those days we members of staff were happy to take this well-paying job. I was new to teaching. We in the teaching and support team saw the school as the vibrant hub of a teaching, socializing and behaviour management regime. Our purpose was to help these 'delinquent' children 'behave' and 'improve' and 'become

responsible adults'. Howard brought with him from the north of England a different view, based on a much-needed, realistic, child-centred philosophy. He was credible as both the headteacher and as a class teacher. He was a role model from the outset and everybody recognised this. He continued in the work for many years and published valuable research (Firth, 1992, 1993, 1995a, 1995b).

In class I was experiencing problems with a pupil whom I will call Joe (a pseudonym). I had given Joe a sanction – a lunchtime detention, as I recall. But I needed Howard's approval for this so I took Joe to see him in his office where I put my case. Howard asked Joe to wait outside. When we were alone Howard asked me to tell him the whole story, which I did, closing with: "He defied me. He swore at me in front of other children. He refused to apologise and I want him punished". Howard wondered what purpose the punishment would serve. I said something about Joe learning from the consequences of his behaviour. "I wonder," said Howard, "if this punishment will change his behaviour?" I thought Howard was trying to blame me for being a poor teacher and said as much. He assured me that this was not his thought. He said it was about Joe only, adding: "We don't know him yet – he doesn't know us. We don't know about his previous experiences. He doesn't know how much fun we have here". I asked Howard what we should do. He agreed we should punish Joe because I had said we would and to not do so would confuse him. "But keep it minimal," Howard said. "because we need to get to know him. Can you put him in the football team this Friday? We need to read his file – it hasn't arrived yet – neither has he, for that matter – well, not the best part of him". Howard's words reassured me considerably. I asked him why he thought Joe had been so difficult for me: "He might be testing you. It might be his way of finding out about people. We'll watch him closely and talk

later". My story of Howard finishes there but I have many other memories of him, his work and his positive influence on my own work with children educated out of mainstream school (Forde, 1987).

**(ii) being a member of a large, Catholic, immigrant family**

A young child is unaware from any meta-perspective of his preordained role in the family he is born into. Indeed, if he was like me, he would have no choice about being born fifth of seven children to Irish parents. It takes years for the infant to raise questions about his origins and the nature of people. Fritz, the child studied by Melanie Klein (Klein, 1950a), was four years of age before he began to ask such questions. Consequently it took some years before I fully realised that my six siblings shared, arguably equally, the resources offered by our mother and father. It took ten years for me to become fully aware that my mother and father both spoke with an Irish accent that the neighbours and teachers at school did not always understand. It took me more years to build up the courage to ask my parents about *their* early life experiences in County Waterford, Ireland. I had to become a confident adult before I dared, many years later, to repeat the exercise with my father and really listen to his words. I guess a lot of people miss this step out entirely. It takes years before a child can begin to see himself as an individual amongst different individuals, both in his family and outside of it. It takes years to compare aspects of one's life with those from other children and families and from different social backgrounds.

But one way or another we do manage to grow older and, if not wiser, possibly smarter (Egan, 2002, p.18). Children quickly become shrewd. I know from my hundreds, if not thousands, of discussions with children that I have worked with as an educational psychologist that they are

astutely aware of differences in people. They know about their peers at school. They know who is rich and who is poor. They know who is fast at running and who is slow. They know who can read well and who cannot. They know when the teacher is 'up to' the challenge of teaching the lesson and when he is not. As youthful years pass, feelings of identity, self-worth and purpose grow. The young adult struggles to come to terms with himself, his identity and his purposes in a changing world. He dances to the musical strains of power, *virtu* and *fortuna* (Nederman, 2014) as he embarks upon a phenomenological journey understood through personal experiences, challenges, opportunities, disappointments, joys, sadnesses and emerging life projects. All this happened to me too. Now, in my late 60s, I can list some of the personal outcomes. No doubt these play like an understated descant to the words of this thesis. They include:

- memories of being part of a large, happy, Catholic family
- positive feelings of self-worth, identity and a sense of belonging
- values gained through contact with people – some fictional, most of them real
- belief in human truth, moral enterprise, equal opportunity and social justice
- the right to think for myself, to decide and act in ways that strike a balance between personal valency and the constraints imposed by family, work and society
- the right to make mistakes and hopefully learn from them
- the skills to listen to what people say, to read what they have written and to appreciate their artistic creations, their views and opinions
- to examine critically the different perspectives and the contributions of others
- realising that we all have the right to disagree and that any of us can be wrong

### (iii) being an outsider

At about the age of 11 years I realized for the first time that my parents were not British and were, in fact, Irish. They had told me this long before then but it had not sunk in. I saw that they considered themselves to be 'outsiders' in terms of their Irish origins and attitudes compared to British attitudes. "She's no queen of mine!" my father would say when Her Royal Highness, the Queen, appeared on the first television news programme I watched in 1962. About this time a friend of mine from school came to my house to play – an uncommon event as in those days as we did not get many visitors and my father did not encourage such things. My father spoke to my friend, his voice thick with its Irish accent. My friend had no idea what my father was saying and he blushed in embarrassment. So did my father. And so did I, realising for the first time that my father and my mother both spoke in a strong Irish accent, something I had become completely attenuated to and was previously unconscious of. For the first time in my life I could see that *my parents were not English! – they were Irish!* One thought promotes another: their humble, quiet and unobtrusive manner in life was now explained by the fact that they considered themselves to be not-entirely-accepted immigrants on that new council estate in Yorkshire. *Their* feelings of being 'outsiders' became *my* feelings of being 'outsider'. These were feelings that would return at regular intervals in my life. Indeed, become part of my life. Not only do I recognize this, I now prefer it. I must have courted it also because, as Maynard Smith explains (Smith, 1979; also this thesis, ch5ii), it has 'worked' for me. I will recount two such 'outsider' moments, the first prior to embarking on a career in education, the second in more-recent recent years and directly relevant to the subject of school exclusion.

When I was 16 years of age I took a place at the local Grammar School to study for General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level examinations, taking mainly science subjects. Some months earlier, at the local technical college, I had secured the best GCE Ordinary level passes of the 1967 cohort. At Grammar School that brief elevation would be quickly redressed – I secured possibly the worst GCE Advanced level passes of the 1969 cohort. Three members of staff – two Science teachers and one PE teacher – felt that my background, character and personality differences were a positive contribution to the rich life of Grammar School. I achieved an Advanced level pass in Biology and became the captain of the gymnastics club and the rugby team. But three other members of staff – the Maths teacher, the English teacher and the Chemistry teacher – felt differently about things. I was quickly excluded from Advanced level Maths for chewing gum. I failed Advanced level Chemistry outright and I was persuaded to drop out of the University Entrance English course. But I am in no way suggesting that I was an innocent victim of cultural prejudice - I was an combatant in a complex, social game.

Being at Grammar School was, as I recall it, positive and memorable. The sporting facilities were second to none. I met educated, eloquent people who held different views from my own and our educational life trajectories ran in parallel for those two years. Any experiences of academic failure or mild social exclusion in Grammar School only served to motivate me to improve. Why was I not downtrodden by these transient events of academic, and sometimes social, exclusion? One answer is that I was, as the Biology teacher once commented: “as tough as old boots” - I think I inherited that from my father. I had other role models but I kept their identities secret. Besides my father and my older brother there were fictional ones - Edgar Rice Burroughs’ stoic character, Tarzan, in *Tarzan of the apes* (Burroughs, [1914] 1990); the fictional

cowboy hero, the Virginian, from the 1960s TV series of the same name; and the Chinaman, Kwai Chang Caine, from the 1970s TV series, *Kung Fu*. Faced with any uncertain situation I was, I recall, confident enough to wait a while and look closer at the problem. If I had to make a difficult decision, I relied on the guidance of my private role models. In a way, as Jaynes (*ibid*) describes in chapter seven, I 'heard' their voices of guidance at times of doubt. My interest in people grew and my love for science grew. Later I became a PE teacher, a special educational needs teacher and then an educational psychologist. But in the various work roles I have held I have never come across any of my Grammar School friends again. It must be a big country - or perhaps a socially stratified one.

The second experience occurred a number of years ago and was significant in terms of the birth of this thesis. I was the educational psychologist consultant to the Alternative Provision (AP) system run by a local authority in England. That particular AP system offered a modified and skills-based curriculum for KS4 students who were deemed to 'need it'. Most of those who 'needed it' were either permanently excluded from school or under threat of such. From a KS4 population of around 12,500 students approximately 100 Year 10 and 100 Year 11 students were educated in the AP system in any given year (i.e. 1.6% of the Key Stage). The numbers did not fluctuate much as the half dozen or so AP colleges were always full. Such arrangements are not uncommon in Britain (Kendall *et al*, 2002; Kendall *et al*, 2007). I joined a team of professionals who identified, placed and supported the students who were considered to 'have' behavioural issues, the quote at the beginning of this chapter being relevant here. A feature of that particular local authority (and, no doubt, other local authorities) was and perhaps still is that most of the students, most being male, were *persuaded* to leave their mainstream high

schools and join the AP system. I know this from first hand experience. Kendal *et al* (2002) provides a review of outcomes of such systems nationally. I discuss some concerns below and return to the matter again in chapter four.

In those post-2000 years and in that particular (unnamed) local authority, 100 new students per year found their ways to the AP college that was allocated to them. It was not possible for parents of the students or other members of the public or indeed for me, a consultant to the AP system, to 'read up' on any particular AP college in that local authority via the council's website. It was not possible for parents to choose between specific AP colleges. I recently (27 March 2018) logged on to that council's website and I found that it still is not possible to 'read up' on their AP colleges, although the council website does direct the reader to an informative OFSTED report (2011) on the matter. One or two AP colleges do have their own individual websites which describe their college offer but the intimate relationship between these independent, specialist colleges and the local authority's provisions for 'disruptive' KS4 students via the AP college system is not made clear. One website, referring to one (unnamed), independently-run KS4 college in one local authority notes: "(the) College is an independent school offering education and support to 14-16 year old students who are not within mainstream education" (source details have been suppressed).

The result of this paucity of information was (and still may be) that, in that particular local authority (but no doubt in others) parents who *might want to know* did not know (and still do not know) about the existence, function, effectiveness of, and lack of choice in, the AP system that operates. In my experience parents were given little or no information about origins of and rationale behind the AP system in that local authority. The AP offer was only notified to the



parent at the point at which the their child was deemed to 'need it'. Parental choice then reduced to 'take it or leave it'. One might immediately ask who needed it most – the student or the referring high school? The alternative to accepting the placement for the parent was to risk their child's permanent exclusion from mainstream high school with no other school to go to. My impression was that the threat of permanent exclusion was only voiced in *private meetings* in school between senior members of staff and the parent of the 'disruptive' child. I have never witnessed such a meeting or read the minutes of such a meeting but about a dozen parents told me their story of 'persuasion'. The situation in the English educational system regarding the efficacy of AP systems may have improved considerably in intervening years but my recent literature review of the matter (McCluskey *et al*, 2015; Hemmer *et al*, 2013; Thomson and Pennacchia, 2016) does not allay my concerns expressed here.

Prior to offering an AP placement to a 'disruptive' student, school-based behaviour support was presumably offered. If that proved unsuccessful in terms of changing the student's behaviour (or modifying the perceptions of school staff about the student's behaviour) the student was then at high risk of permanent exclusion. My own impressions as consultant to the AP system was that the school's educational psychologist was not involved in most cases of a student's transfer from mainstream to the AP system. There seems to be no way of knowing how many students are so persuaded to leave high school under the threat of permanent exclusion. About this I had (and still have) few information sources to draw from, my main source being my direct contact with AP students and their parents. So, using the government database, I began researching the matter.

Official figures for permanent exclusions in English schools in recent academic years are reported on a government website. Go to [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), type the words 'school exclusions' into the search bar and scroll down the publications list to find data for any particular local authority in any recent academic year. The website does not provide data on individual schools exclusion rates. In the local authority where I worked in 2009/2010 an annual permanent exclusion figure of 'less than five' was posted in document SFR17/2011.

([www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-from-schools-in-england-academic-year-2009-to-2010](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-from-schools-in-england-academic-year-2009-to-2010)). The figure of 'less than five' appears many times in document SFR17/2011. It is a *much smaller* figure than 100, which is the number of KS4 students who moved out of mainstream and into to the AP system in that particular local authority in academic year 2009 to 2010.

I investigated further despite experiencing difficulties in doing so. Pupil identities are protected on the government website and, in terms of that one local authority and the students who transferred to the AP system, there was little in the way of a paper trail for me to follow. My concern was that numbers for students who were *persuaded* to leave mainstream high schools would not show up on local authority tables for the annual permanent exclusion rates. I therefore suspected that the figure, 'less than five', was a gross underestimate of the true number of children who were effectively excluded from school. One vital statistic that I can report is that, in the seven school terms I acted as consultant to the AP system, 233 KS4 students moved out of mainstream into the AP system and none of them transferred back - it was a one-way ticket. I am describing here a picture of unreported exclusions. The issues of social injustice, lack of local authority accountability and lack of comparative research between

APs and mainstream schools in terms of comparing long-term outcomes have also been highlighted by Thomas and Russell (2009).

I was concerned and I raised my concerns with my line manager. He told me: “These colleges offer a much-needed form of support and most of the students who attend are very happy to be out of mainstream school” (the words of a AP system manager in an unnamed local authority). I agreed with him in the main - the part I disagreed with was what the size of 'most' was. He suggested a figure of 95% but my on-the-job experience suggested that the satisfied majority was more like 85%, and possibly as low as 80%. The size of 'most' in that particular local authority may well be different now but I fear we will never know. As Thomas and Russell (*ibid*) note, such information is not available in 'free-flow' throughout Britain. This is unusual, given that decisions to permanently exclude or to persuade the student to accept a place in AP college are made for 'good' reasons and on the basis of rational and co-operative decision-making. (Having read MacIntyre (2007), I am unable to use the word 'good' in this context without using inverted commas).

I was fairly certain of a 15 -20% disaffected minority because I took it upon myself to meet them. I met more than forty such students over a two-year period. The reason I met them was because they were referred to me by the AP college or the parent because of some problem that someone had encountered. Most of the students I met told me that they did not want to leave mainstream high school or they did not like the particular college they were assigned to. As previously mentioned, the students could not *choose* which of the AP colleges to attend – the decision was made for them. I carried out some preliminary research. Of the 15-20% disaffected minority (by which I mean those who were referred to me) some had settling-in

issues, some experienced issues of self-identity, some had poor attendance at college; and a few students, whose number is not known, rejected the AP system entirely either because it was imposed upon them. Six male students told me that there were too few girls in the AP, most students in the AP system being male.

As an outsider myself, I held the cause of these kindred spirits close to my heart. I devoted time to them. I sourced their views. I made what I thought were valuable suggestions to their parents and their college managers. And, occasionally, I let my fellow team members in the AP system know where things were possibly going wrong. But I embarked upon my quest in isolation. No other educational psychologist was involved in this work and few asked about it. Colleagues would listen if I spoke but they would not say much themselves. The manager of the AP system did not support my quest-work but he did not impede it either - my guess is that a part of him agreed with it. My line managers in the educational psychology service would only accept my exploratory work, which lay outside of the narrow brief of my role, if it did not lead to any problems or complaints. But it did lead to problems and my consultancy role was abruptly terminated after two years and one term. Sadness was mixed with relief because whatever it was that I was doing in the AP system, it had proved stressful and largely - or entirely? - unsuccessful, not least because I was working in isolation. My 'outsider' status was confirmed by the termination of my consultancy role. Being an 'outsider' by choice can bring with it benefits but the risk of facing further social exclusion remains ever-present.

#### **(iv) a fascination with science**

I first realized that I loved natural and experimental science in 1961 when the Science teacher's experiment blew up, covering most of the First Year class in that secondary modern class in

acid, so much so that our clothes began to fragment there and then. Science, it occurred to me in a flash, was powerful but it was logical – *the experiment blew up for a reason!* After Catholic secondary school I took six GCE Ordinary level subjects at Technical College, followed by three GCE science Advanced level courses at Grammar School. I studied Psychology at University because I have always been interested in the behaviour of people. I worked as a Science teacher in four special schools in the south of England and I observed a dozen Science lessons in the north of England as part of my Master of Science studies (Forde, 1997). Fascinated by quantitative methods, I once worked as a research psychologist for the police force in Hampshire, contributing to a study of stress in the police force. My role was to interview people and then design, disseminate and then analysing data derived from a sophisticated questionnaire that was completed by 1300 serving officers of all ranks. My name never made it to accreditation list, however (Brown and Campbell, 1990) but the work did prove to be a unique experience for a life-long science groupie. For most of my adult life I have been a positivist, captivated by the allure of natural and experimental science, social science and the usual epistemologies that underpin these. But it was only after 2008, when I joined the Doctoral programme in Educational Psychology at Sheffield University, that I felt that I had really been given the permission to read and question some of my long-held positivist beliefs. I began to critically review those beliefs. I recall quoting to a university tutor some numbers that 'proved' something or other. He asked: “What makes you attach so much significance to those numbers?” The question left me floored.

One of the reasons this thesis took so long to write was because it took years for me to lay aside my strong belief in the power of scientific method based on an epistemology that hails

directly from the Age of Enlightenment. My first choice for a thesis topic was to employ QSort methodology to pursue what Exel and Graaf (2005) call “.. the systematic study of subjectivity” (p.1). I had used my own concocted version of QSort in a previous study (Forde, 1997) without realising that somebody else had perfected the method (Stenner and Stainton-Rogers, 2004). At that time I had sought to learn how teachers and pupils spoke and thought about all the things that occurred in school Science lessons. In later QSort years I planned to discover what headteachers thought and would say about the matter of permanent school exclusion, including the reasons they might decide to use this severe sanction. My university tutor at that time, who favoured qualitative methods, said: “So when you find out what is wrong with how headteachers think about school exclusion, then presumably you will tell them. And what will happen then? Will they all change their views?” This also left me speechless. My life-time's subscription to quantitative methodology in social scientific study took another severe blow. What value, I asked myself, could the powerful methodology of QSort offer if it could not change the problem which it revealed?

I began to question the value of *everybody's* subscription to the ‘familiar and traditional’ epistemologies that underpin much of modern scientific inquiry. What good are these when faced with the intractable questions of social inequality, social injustice and social disadvantage? I began to wonder not only why regrettable and unjust things keep on happening in society, especially to vulnerable groups, but also why we find it difficult to talk about them? Why are our discussions of so many subjects – such as how many children are permanently excluded from school in your local authority? – difficult to have, seemingly socially taboo subjects of discussion? Why are obviously-regrettable and unjust situations in the world

repeated, year on year, generation on generation? Would Copernicus, Einstein, Faraday and Galileo be happy with our modern world? There is something wrong with an epistemology that underpins social scientific inquiry when it reveals real problems for people but yet cannot offer any promise of the even the beginnings of a change that is so obviously required?

**(v) a passion for social justice**

At various times in this thesis I reveal core values that I seem to hold, i.e. that I dislike social exclusion and that to permanently exclude a child from school is generally the wrong thing to do and is sometimes a pernicious act. I do not justify this value here, I simply recognise it. But I should ask why is it wrong to permanently exclude and in what way is it wrong? Is this a matter of social justice? Is it a question of morality? Is it an expression of power imbalance, the influence of the strong over the weak? Is it best understood as a form of institutional expediency embedded in a complex, changing world? Is it, as Gergen (*ibid*) puts it:

“.. what is the value of other people? .. If they actively interfere with our well-being are we not justified in punishing, incarcerating or even eliminating them? This same attitude of me versus you insinuates itself as well into our view, nature and other cultures. It is always a matter of whose welfare is at stake” (p.xiv).

Whilst I strive for social justice, I arrived at a point in my work where my subscription to this core value has, if not diminished, then at least crumbled a little. In recent years, working with children, reading about and studying school exclusion I have begun to realize that it is unrealistic to expect a free and open discussion about social justice, social equality or even common sense in the complex situations where permanent exclusion from school occurs. The best that one might have to settle for seems to occur at the single case level - evidence of

wisdom, limited success, a conciliatory amendment to a drastic course of action and perhaps success in asking for more patience to delay what seems like an inevitable decision. Or is this just an illusion of self-accomplishment?

I have found it more than disappointing looking for solutions, hoping for the promise of change, in research articles based upon ‘familiar and traditional’ forms of social science inquiry and their underlying epistemologies and methodologies. My disappointment is made clear in chapter three but, just in case it is not, in chapter eight I cite the work of Noguera (2003) and a pilot study by the Department of Education (2013) to reveal, in one final outing, the impotence of such studies. I also highlight the report of the Children's Commissioner (2014), which makes depressing reading. Hope is not on the horizon. I doubt that any institution, school or local authority is paying for credible, independent research into these matters of social injustice, social exclusion and social suffering in 2018 England – at least not research that will really change things. In this thesis I concentrate on English schools and only occasionally cite research from other countries. There is, for example, some evidence that the picture for excluded children is not quite so dire in Ireland (Barr *et al*, 2000).

#### **(vi) the permission to read**

I consider reading non-fiction books to be a high-value, unobtrusive pleasure. Reading is a portal that leads to the thoughts, lives and experiences of other people. But the really important texts are difficult to read. To read these texts, especially ones about complex social issues, one needs to sign up for a university course and sit with other like-minded people who are prepared to read the works of Agamben (1995), Bion (1961, 1962), Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982) and MacIntyre (*ibid*). In my fourth decade of working in education I found that I needed



external approval to engage with these more-difficult writers. Such study is not undertaken lightly. I needed to pluck up the courage to begin to read the thoughts of these powerful writers. Once started, I found myself confessing my ignorance and lack of understanding about some of what I had read. My tutors and doctoral peers supplied duly supportive words of encouragement and so I kept going. It has taken courage and permission to re-read a difficult text. I, like many other people, cannot easily find a quote in a book once the book is shut. And it takes confidence, good reason and an unusual form of self-authorisation to write in the margins of the page of a great piece of work - after all, someone else might read the gibberish I have written! I confess that, at times, my reading diet has been that of a wandering, curious omnivore, not that of a research-focussed carnivore. I am far from being a connoisseur of philosophical inquiry.

About my own reading diet I would like to engage in a thought experiment. I would like to divide up into two piles some of the books I have read in recent years: the ones *before* my subscription to positivism weakened and the ones after. By 'positivism' I mean the "system of philosophy recognising only that which can be scientifically verified or logically proved" (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2003). On the 'before' side I read Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009), Prigogine (1984), Shirer (1960), Schrodinger (1967), Smoot (1995), Young (1953) and many others of similar ilk. On the 'after' side I read Agamben (1995), Bion (1961, 1962), Jaynes (1976), Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982) MacIntyre (2007), Mercieca (2011), Sereny (1995), Zizek (2002) and others. The difference between the two sets is, I would argue, an engagement in positivism versus the questioning of positivism (respectively). The first set of books subscribe to an epistemology belonging to a supposedly real, accountable, physical world that can be

understood using familiar and traditional tools of natural philosophy, physical science, natural science and social science. The second set ask disturbing but important questions of humankind, society, people in society and how we might understand our human society. The second set inspect the void between research and practice. The epistemologies that underpin these works are less fixed, less certain and yet more captivating.

The second set of books also challenge unspoken, deeply-held views about the relationships between the person and the group, the person and society, humans and animal, etc. Agamben (*ibid*) writes about recurring forms of social inequality throughout the ages of humankind. Bion writes about unacknowledged social forces that impact on our individual behaviour (Bion, *ibid*) and how we learn from our experiences (Bion, 1962). Jaynes (*ibid*) questions the very origins and nature of conscious experience itself. McIntyre (*ibid*) explains how our moral tenets have a confused origin. Mercieca (*ibid*) asks us, as professionals working on behalf of vulnerable clients, to learn to live more comfortably with uncertainty, to not sacrifice compassion for our clients for the sake of bureaucratic accountability (p.108). Sereny (*ibid*) questions the justice dispensed by the Nuremberg trials of the late 1940s. And Zizek (*ibid*) asks us to question populist opinion and perceptions on any matter 'social'.

It is important to note that only recently have I read the works of Burman (2017), Damasio (*ibid*) and Gergen (*ibid*). I can see now, in retrospect, considerable overlap in what I have written and the philosophy they describe. Although I try to weave into this thesis important insights from these three, I would point out that I wrote the bulk of this thesis before I read their works. One of the reasons I have found this thesis difficult to write is that, in the act of reading, I became a 'groupie' of the theorist just read – I tended to accept their perspective and

its underlying epistemology. It takes considerable effort to apply criticality to one's reading preferences. I am only just beginning to detect the epistemology embedded in what I read years ago and the inherent conflict with arguments I am presenting in this thesis. I think I am not alone in my confusion. I recognise that I am trying to say something difficult here.

**(vii) a place from which to speak**

One of the chapters in a PhD thesis I read during my thesis journey is entitled 'a place from which to speak' (Corcoran, 2006). The title covers an important aspect of writing that Peter Carey (this thesis, ch2) has also discussed. Where is the place from which I can speak or write? When I recognised that my work with the AP system was coming to an end I wrote a discussion paper in which I identified the deficits in the system that I had been consultant to. I sent it to the team manager. He did not reply – as the soon-to-be-replaced consultant I no longer had a place from which to speak and the paper was never disseminated. In writing this thesis I see that I am creating another place from which to speak. Which begs the question to whom am I addressing my narrative account? Myself is one obvious answer. My university tutor is another answer. But it is important to make some of the lessons I have learnt available to my colleagues in the profession of educational psychology. My second research question highlights this.

**(viii) summary of this chapter**

To some extent we are all shaped by our experiences. When Howard, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, joined the special school where I worked in the 1980s he required of us that we question what we did. He required of us that we question what we said to and what we wrote about children in that residential special school. I was in my early thirties and that lesson was important. Much of my behaviour over the years has been shaped by the legacy of

my Catholic upbringing in West Yorkshire in those days of mills, chimneys, smoke, rugby and Grammar Schools. Grammar School was orderly, mills were mechanistic, my Catholic father had family rules that we had to keep. After university, I chose to work with children and my work experiences became wide and varied. I saw, in the library of possible life journeys, a journey that seemed to suit me. On that journey I would occasionally wear the garments of an 'outsider' and from time to time I dressed in that way because it 'worked' for me. But inside, in my thinking, I subscribed to a 'familiar and traditional' epistemological tradition. I was a budding scientist, a positivist and I could see order within order, and social order within social order. As I grew older and continued to read and study and meet many people in the course of my work, people whose lives and views were all different and yet important, I became more of a pragmatist and reductionist. More lately I have become a keen critic of theories of human behaviour, as will become apparent in the following pages.

One of the most memorable books I read during my reductionist period was Young ([1950] 1956). In developing a model of neural functioning he remained on the Cartesian side of the Descartes / Spinoza debate and dismissed entirely the possibility of mind (Shein, 2009). Young spoke directly to me in those days. A few years later I enrolled on the Doctorate in Education programme. Gentle questioning and probing and encouragement to read began to unlock matters. I can chart a crude path from positivism through reductionism towards an appreciation of the qualitative nature of being and of social inquiry. This thesis represents one further step away from epistemologies that rely on analogical representations of people in clinical experiments, which often reduce to the collection of numbers and confirmatory tests of statistical significance. This thesis represents a step toward recognising value in postmodern

epistemology. This thesis is something that I was always writing, long before I actually began to write it. A narrative style seems to suit me. Will my colleagues in the profession agree?

Another quote from Gergen (*ibid*) fits here:

“So what,” you may respond. “It is simply a fact that we are separate individuals, each living in a private consciousness. That is just life”. Or is it? If we accept this view of ourselves as bounded beings, the essential “me” dwelling behind the eyeballs, then we must continuously confront issues of separation. I must always be on guard, less others see the faults in my thinking, the cesspools of my emotions, and the embarrassing motives behind my actions .. This view pervades our schools and organisations, where individual evaluation haunts our steps from the first moment we step into a classroom to our ultimate retirement”. (Gergen, p.xiii - xiv. The use of inverted commas is Gergen’s).

Things, perhaps, are far more complicated than I first thought.

## **chapter three: the story of school exclusion**

The Report of the Children's Commissioner (2014) notes:

“This Inquiry has found evidence of ('unofficial' or 'informal' exclusions) .. This practice is illegal .. The system of school exclusions is not compliant with the (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)”

(pp.16 & 17 of the Executive Summary. The words in brackets are taken from the original report and re-inserted by me to improve readability).

In this chapter I discuss the limitations of the ‘familiar and traditional’ methodologies and the epistemologies that underpin much of the research into the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school. In order to do this I review local authority and government publications and cite relevant journal articles. I define what I mean by permanent exclusion from school. I define what I mean by ‘familiar and traditional’ forms of inquiry and make a case against them. In later chapters I turn to more creative, humanistic and qualitative forms of inquiry.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- (i) fictional story: Adam
- (ii) the current situation regarding school exclusions
- (iii) the stigma of permanent exclusion
- (iv) problems with truth, evidence, human experience and definitions
- (v) problems with ‘familiar and traditional’ epistemologies and methodologies
- (vi) research that challenges the practice of making permanent exclusions
- (vii) summary of this chapter

**(i) fictional story: Adam**

Sometimes the work of an educational psychologist brings her close to a child who is permanently excluded from school, seemingly unjustly so. Sometimes the psychologist bears witness to the unfolding of the spectacle. The experience can be hurtful to all concerned, not least the child, the child's parents and members of staff in the school from which the child was excluded. Sometimes the psychologist struggles to find reason in the complex process of the distressing situation she is part of.

Adam was 9 years of age and new to the school, his family having recently moved home. He was referred to the educational psychology service due to his inexplicable and severe emotional outbursts in lessons. These were considered by members of school staff to be disruptive to the learning of the other children. Adam's mother told the psychologist that her son was fine at home and that nothing out of the ordinary occurred in school until he was about 5 years of age. Then a significant family trauma occurred and this affected Adam very badly. The psychologist visited the family home several times. She suspected that there was more depth to the family suffering than offered but Adam's mother chose not to disclose more. In school Adam was allocated a full-time support assistant and the educational psychologist visited three times. Adam proved to be pleasant, sociable, intelligent and sensitive - in many ways, just an ordinary boy, perhaps prone to anxiety, struggling to adjust and adapt to a new school, a new environment, a new friendship group.

But behaviour standards in this primary school were high and the school behaviour log described a different picture of Adam. He frequently became angry, especially when asked to attempt any work close to the point at which it became academically challenging - clearly he

was struggling emotionally. The psychologist witnessed Adam 'turn' from being calm to becoming emotional during one of her meetings with him. Something was bothering Adam - a cloud moved across his face - but he could not say what. For no apparent reason his mood changed and his expression became troubled. He stopped talking, working and interacting. At such times his support assistant, who had been instructed to do so, would take him away to a private area in the school where he could be helped to 'calm down' until he was ready to return to lessons.

Researching the matter further, the psychologist found that in his previous primary school Adam had received the support of a nurture group. Nurture groups are not an uncommon support strategy used by schools and receive positive research outcomes (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). Whilst this form of support was in place for Adam, no emotional, behavioural or learning problems were noted. The consequences of withdrawal of nurture group support has not yet attracted much research, although moves to increase their use in secondary schools now occur (Colley, 2012). The psychologist's role in the present was to provide advice to the SENCo and to Adam's mother about how to understand and manage the boy's emotionally unpredictable behaviour. The pattern seemed clear: Adam would be working in the classroom then suddenly refuse to work. If pressed by the teacher, he would get angry, shout and try to run away, sometimes out of school and towards his home, disrupting the learning of other children in the process. This was more than a daily occurrence. Of note, Adam displayed neither violence towards people nor did he damage property – his problems emerged from 'within him' and he expressed them in the form of avoidance behaviour. The school context was also relevant - a high-achieving school located in a semi-rural catchment area. In



this school few children showed such unsettled behaviour. The SENCo involved all the necessary local authority support services as a matter of course but the psychologist could hear - or could imagine - the cogs of a ratchet turning in the background.

The psychologist suggested that Adam needed time to settle in to his new school. Adam's behaviour, she suggested, might be understood as a response to earlier family trauma.

Appropriate responses might include the use of 'time out' cards, a 'safe haven' where Adam could 'calm down' and therapeutic approaches, such as art therapy. Setting up a nurture group was discounted on the grounds of cost. The psychologist suggested drastically diminishing the demands made upon Adam 'to work'.

The psychologist felt that her suggestions were ignored, re-interpreted or drowned out by the sound of the ratchet turning. Adam's situation deteriorated and the decision was made to permanently exclude him from school. Arrangements were made to educate him at the Primary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) under Day 6 provision (McCluskey *et al*, 2015). Under English legislation in place at that time (and still in place at the time of writing) when a child is permanently excluded from a school for more than five days he or she must be offered education in a school or resource base by the sixth day of being permanently excluded. A request was made for a Statutory Assessment of Adam's special educational needs under the appropriate provisions. Prior to 2014 the provisions were 1996 Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs. This was replaced by the English 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice. The psychologist wrote psychological advice indicating that a mainstream school placement was the appropriate educational setting for Adam.

Soon after, Adam found his way to a special school for children with needs collectively described as Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties. The acronym, SEBD, was replaced by Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) in recent years. A special school placement was not the psychologist's advice but Adam's mother accepted it because the school ran a nurture group and she felt that Adam would benefit from this. Adam's placement in special school continued through into his secondary school years. On making discreet inquiries via parent about a year after her initial involvement the psychologist learned that Adam's permanent exclusion was never formally ratified. It was spoken about and then Adam attended the PRU. But once his mother agreed to a special school placement the 'permanent exclusion' faded away and it did not show up on official figures. The work left a bitter aftertaste in the mouth of the educational psychologist. Some argue that experiencing such emotion is a necessary step in the learning experience (Bion, 1962, p.6).

I fear that the fictional story of Adam reflects a literal truth for an unknown number of children who are permanently excluded from English schools - or who believe they have been permanently excluded. Their special needs are not adequately taken into account (Hayden, 2006), they are viewed as candidates for special school placement; and the invisible 'cogs' of local authority machinery turn quickly. These children are primed for exclusion - at least this is the impression I have gained in an uncomfortable number of cases. The child and his parent are told he must not to come to school. When parent reluctantly agrees to accept a new or special school placement, or placement of their child at the PRU, permanent exclusion then becomes a mute topic. It is then not recorded on official local authority and government tables. This double-dealing is concealed in the fluid nature of the relationship between truth, definition,

evidence and meaning (this thesis, ch3iv). As I will argue later in this chapter, disingenuousness in recording all permanent exclusions is just one strategy used to obfuscate the magnitude of the school exclusion problem.

The situation has got to change – it is confusing, illogical, insensitive, based on false reasoning, false economy and it is damaging to children involved. At the very least the situation requires investigation (with a mandate to change things) both at local and national levels. At some future date, if a case similar to Adam's is tested in a court of law or in a tribunal, it will prove expensive and damaging to the reputation of the local authority. The situation as described is arguably illegal, as the report of the Children's Commissioner (*ibid*) suggests. The situation in respect of permanently excluding children from schools is occluded and the reporting of statistics is subject to political persuasion. Crucially, studies which elucidate the problem seem to have no impact whatsoever in terms of promoting change. The report of the Children's Commissioner (2014) makes dour reading and is imbued with a depressing tone of resignation – I wonder if the Commissioner *has* resigned? School exclusion has a history as long as the advent of modern schooling. It is firmly part of the *status quo* of school and social life of England; and it is a practice inadequately held to account. It is discussed with reluctance, researched with impotence and accepted with resignation by government agencies. Permanent school exclusion is a practice seemingly immune to the persuasion of educational psychologists. As an institutional practice it continues unabated - in fact, with machine-like regularity - despite the evidence of research that exposes the practice as questionable - questionable at best, reprehensible at worst.

## **(ii) the current situation regarding school exclusions**

For many years I have worked with children who have special educational needs. I have worked in many local authorities, often on behalf of children at risk of permanent exclusion or those actually excluded. I found that some children were persuaded to leave the school they previously attended. I once worked as a teacher in a Social Services-run residential special school where almost all the children had been permanently excluded from school. I was once the educational psychology consultant to a local authority AP system (this thesis, ch2iii). I have read a great deal of research. I am familiar with the matter of school exclusion in its various guises. If anyone should know the current situation in England I should. But I do not for reasons that I now describe.

It seems reasonable to begin by inquiring about the number of children permanently excluded from schools in any one local authority in a given academic year. Over the years my access to such information has varied from place to place. Even when holding a specialist consultancy role I found few reliable figures to pin my thoughts on. Figures for permanent exclusion seem to be closely guarded secrets despite the fact that local authorities are now obliged to make them public - seemingly a paradox. The immediate problem of defining the term 'permanent exclusion' serves as a barrier to knowing and understanding the current situation. Blythe and Milner (1996) have provided a definition that we can begin with:

“Exclusion is the means by which the headteacher of a school can prevent a child or young person from attending the school, either for a fixed period (not exceeding fifteen days in any single school term) or permanently. It is, therefore, school driven” (p.3).

In a definition that confuses the social act with personhood and the child's future lifepaths, the Department for Education (DfE, 2015) notes: "Permanent exclusion refers to a pupil who is excluded *and who will not come back to that school* (unless the exclusion is overturned)" (p.5. My own use of italics). One detects a subtle difference in the two definitions cited. The italicised phrase in this paragraph makes the school's position with respect to the excluded child crystal clear. One senses legalistic positioning.

So what is the current situation locally? Local authorities notify the government of permanent exclusions via a national database accessible to the public, as discussed below. The website provides information on the numbers of permanent exclusions from state funded primary, secondary and special schools in England broken down by local authority and by reason, ethnicity, special educational needs (SEN), gender, deprivation level and by type of school. Scanning down the numbers column for a local authority where I worked in a recent target year (The target year chosen was between the year 2000 and the year 2018. The year and the local authority concerned are not identified to preserve the anonymity of people, council officers and services). I found that 'less than five pupils' were permanently excluded from that local authority in that academic year. This compares with that local authority's pupil population of more about 50,000 children between the ages of 4 and 16 years. This figure surprised me because in that target year I had personally worked with two pupils who had been permanently excluded - and I was just one of a dozen or so educational psychologists employed by that local authority. We are told that the government database is regularly updated so I looked again two years later for that same local authority. This time the figure given was zero, which was explained as 'less than four pupils'. I looked again in mid 2016 and the figure provided (for

academic year 2014/15) was 'considerably more', i.e. more than twenty. The first two figures seem low, the third, showing a notable increase, was in line with the national pattern (i.e. 0.07% of total pupil population, the average figure for England in 2014/15). I am left with the image of a magician shuffling cards - but I have made a start! What else can I find in the 'official' picture for English schools?

The 2016 release from the Department for Education describes the picture like this: "The overall rate of permanent exclusions (in England) has increased slightly from 0.06 percent of pupil enrolments in 2013/14 to 0.07 per cent in 2014/15" (document SFR 26/2016, obtained via the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website on 21 July 2016 by placing the words 'school exclusions' in the search bar. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability). The percentage 0.07 equates to 5,800 children. But 0.07 percent is very small, not much higher than zero itself, for that matter. In passing I note that these government tables contain a lot of zeros, explained on the website as follows: when the exclusion figure is less than four it is suppressed so that individual children cannot be identified, which arguably they might. Therefore the number of children permanently excluded from school in England in 2014/15 is reported to be 5,800, which is 0.07 percent of the total pupil population - and the statistic provided for many local authorities is zero. A cynical observer suspects window dressing.

Put another way, in recent years slightly less than one child in a thousand is permanently excluded from schools in England per year – according to official statistics. Surely this is cause

for celebration? Only 5,800 children from over seven million are permanently excluded from English schools year on year! But what does an incidence rate of 0.07 percent mean? It is approaching one in a thousand. One in a thousand is greater than the chance of being knocked down by a car, which is one in four thousand (<https://www.reference.com/math/odds-getting-hit-car-8153e02f5ac36140> accessed on 2 December 2016) but it is less than the chances of being diagnosed with autism, which is one in a hundred in Britain - if we can ignore any difference between England and Britain (<http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/myths-facts-stats.aspx> accessed on 2 December 2016). Of course nobody caused anyone to experience autism and nobody intended to knock down a person on the road. In both cases there is no deliberate intent. Cause and intent relate to purpose, which is a matter examined in later in this chapter. At this point we are informed by official statistics that the number of children in England permanently excluded from school these days is very small. Therefore most families and most classroom teachers will have no direct or indirect knowledge of the matter. But should they have?

Numerous studies, including the report from the Children's Commissioner (2014) cast serious doubts on the verisimilitude of both local authority and government-provided data. So I looked even closer, examining the number of children *effectively* excluded from school in one local authority in England in a post-2000 academic year. There follows a different set of figures that apply to just one local authority over the course of one academic year, somewhere where I once worked as a specialist teacher or educational psychologist. Beneath the cloak of many years direct work with children, schools and local authorities I have come up with a way to look beneath the surface at the numbers provided by the government website.

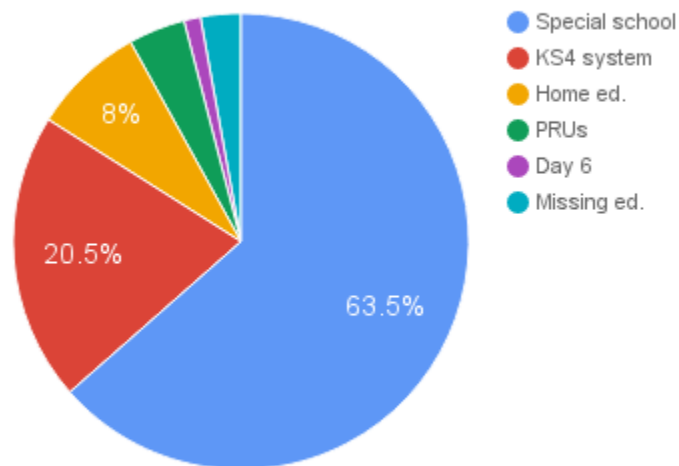
I once worked in local authority where I had access to excluded pupils, to service managers and to various sources of exclusion data. I held a number of positions of small responsibility. For part of the week I was based in the Secondary PRU. I was also involved with Home Educated children. I had access to the staff and students educated in the AP system for KS4 students. I worked with the heads of services and I could phone them up. I used my privileged position to gather up numbers. From these sources I constructed a pie diagram to represent the number of children educated out of mainstream school *for any reason whatsoever* in that local authority in that target year. This adds a visual element to the story of school exclusion.



***diagram 1: numbers of children educated out of mainstream school***

(in one local authority in a target academic year; total number being 1017 pupils  
against a total pupil population of 'about 50,000')

**Children educated out of mainstream school**



*Figures supplied by local authority Intranet services and by personal requests made to heads of services in a recent target year in an unnamed local authority in England.*

### ***notes about diagram 1***

In the target year to which diagram 1 refers, in that unnamed local authority just under 2% of all school children (age 4 to 16 years, i.e. Year R to Year 11 inclusive) were educated out of mainstream school (i.e.  $1017 \times 100 / 50,000$ ). Across all English schools in that academic year 5080 (0.07% of the school population) were permanently excluded in that academic year (SFR17/2012). However, Table 18 of the government website posted a figure of zero for permanent exclusions in that local authority, meaning that 'less than four' children had been permanently excluded from school. There is obviously a big difference between 'educated out of mainstream' and 'permanently excluded'. But I found a way to extract from the former a figure for children who were permanently excluded or strongly persuaded to leave a school or who found some other way out of their difficult predicaments. My line of argument is as follows:

The total number of children educated out of mainstream in that one local authority comprised 1017 individuals. Of these, 646 were educated in special schools, 208 students were educated in the AP system, 81 were home educated, 41 children were educated in the Primary and Secondary PRUs; and there were 29 children missing from education. The 12 pupils on Day 6 provision were all permanently excluded from school. Immediately the number 12 contradicts the government-provided number of 'less than four', explained, perhaps, by the 're-negotiated' nature of permanent exclusion, typified in the story of Adam. The figures shown in diagram 1 do not include children experiencing unofficial exclusion from school, children absent from school for a long time due to medical reasons, children who are 'removals in' to the local authority from another local authority but who had not yet been registered with School

Admissions; and immigrant children arriving in the local authority and not yet attending school. Mathematically speaking, of course, this missing information could only serve to increase the total number of children who were not being educated in mainstream schools - 1017 is likely to be an underestimate.

I now use more creative methods to investigate the numbers of those who were educated out of mainstream school in that target year. I am particularly concerned with those children who had been persuaded to leave their mainstream school to join the AP system operating in that local authority. I had no access to information about the untold numbers of children whose parents succumbed to informal persuasion for their child to leave their mainstream school to join a different mainstream school. So the figures reported below, which originate from public records, will perhaps be an underestimate of the true situation for the excluded/ persuaded/ disenchanted minority. The numbers I cite below do not show up on any local authority database or on any government website but they are the most accurate numbers I can faithfully report as a practitioner working close to the matter.

At this point I should pause to supply the reader with information relating to my own number credentials. I am in my late 60s. I have worked with children excluded or at risk of exclusion for 40 years. I have worked full-time in 7 local authorities and part-time in 3 local authorities in England. I have held teaching appointments in 7 schools. I have worked as a teacher in 5 special schools. I have held educational psychology appointments in 7 local authorities in England. I am skilled in dealing with numbers. I have trained educational psychologists to use SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics). I have applied to my research the tools of informational analysis (Forde, 1977), factor

analysis (Brown *et al*, 1990), discriminant analysis (Forde, 1987) and QSort (Forde, 1997). But it is not the big numbers that concern me - it is the concealed ones.

In the unnamed local authority in the academic year to which diagram 1 refers there were approximately 200 students educated in the AP system, approximately 100 in Year 10 and 100 in Year 11. I was able to estimate from my own work (this thesis, ch2iii) in the AP system that about half the students who joined the system were 'strongly persuaded' to leave mainstream school. Others, of course, were permanently excluded. For many students permanent exclusion occurs as a voiced threat which is withdrawn once the students' parents have signed the papers agreeing for their child's transfer out of mainstream school and into the AP system. If half of AP students represented in diagram 1 had been under threat of permanent exclusion, this would equate to an actual or 'persuaded' (and therefore invisible) total of 50 students per year. It is not double this figure because data for the students who were Year 11 belongs to the year prior to the (second) target year.

My regular contact with children in the PRU informed me that at least half of the 40 or so students there had been permanently excluded from school or believed they had been or faced the imminent threat of such. Very likely their status of being excluded was 'up for grabs', as was the case in the fictitious Adam. A figure of 20 therefore seems a modest estimate of the number of permanent exclusions collected up from that quarter. Like the AP system, the PRU was always full so, year on year, the number remains about the same. There is no data I can offer about pupils permanently excluded from special schools in that particular local authority - maybe none were? The figure I arrive at so far for children effectively permanently excluded in that local authority in the target year where the government website identifies 'less than 4' is

70 derived from 50 from the AP system and 20 from the PRU. I did not add the figure of 12 pupils on Day 6 provision to the grand total because it may have caused an overlap of data.

The picture for home educated children has changed in recent years. The number of 81 children used in diagram 1 was correct in the target year for that local authority. Arora (2006) has written about the reasons parents choose to have their children home educated. I know from a recent article in a newspaper in the same local authority that Arora (*ibid*) researched that the number of home educated pupils there has more than doubled in recent years. There is no way of knowing how many home educated children had been previously under threat of permanent exclusion – such figures are not routinely collected. I fear that a number parents of children under threat of exclusion elect for home education to avoid permanent exclusion. But I have no data to allay or confirm my fears and therefore make the parsimonious estimate that 10 children (from the 81 in the target year) were at risk of permanent exclusion prior to their leaving school. The precise figure may be much higher but we will never know. Ten is the figure I offer to represent the number of those who ‘jumped ship’ or were strongly pushed and took the home educated route.

I can therefore add to the number compiled from my other investigations. The figure I arrive at is 80 children permanently excluded, effectively excluded, excluded by persuasion or who felt they had no choice but to enrol at another school to escape their dire predicament. This figure can be compared to the figure given on the government website for that academic year, i.e. ‘less than four’. The numbers differ by a factor of twenty. If this difference of magnitude was reflected nationally the true level of permanent exclusion (etc.) would be over 100,000 children annually. Could things really be that bad in English schools today? What could explain the

discrepancy between DfE exclusion figures and the figure that I arrived at by making inquiries *in situ*? I concede that my argument is merely suggestive and that the evidence of one educational psychologist in one local authority in one academic year does not prove that the DfE figure is wrong. I am simply relating my direct experience of the matter. And I held a specialist role - if I cannot give a full picture who can?

But does it matter what the precise number of children permanently excluded was, is or will be? Would there be twenty times the amount of concern and shame and twenty times the amount of money spent on research into this matter if the number of children effectively, permanently excluded from English schools year on year really was 100,000 or more? In a situation where the actual number of children excluded from school is concealed or camouflaged or massaged downwards by a convenient rewriting of history then I suggest that numbers do not matter. As Berridge *et al* (2001) notes:

“.. there is evidence that unofficial exclusions continue to take place, though the scale of the problem is difficult, if not impossible, to determine. While schools' motives for excluding students in this way may be benign, it is clear that such manoeuvres afford young people and their families little protection and can have damaging long-term consequences ..” (p.2).

My impression is that the number of children permanently excluded from English schools is a subject associated with national, local authority and local school shame. I feel that investigations into, discussions about and inquiries revealing the precise numbers of children excluded from school are all forbidden activities even for an educational psychologist with a consultancy role in the matter. Nationally, school exclusion is virtually a taboo subject. In

chapters four to seven I offer some insight into the subtle mechanisms that may be at work that impede clear, open and frank discussions about the matter. My impression is that the people who *might know*, the people who *might speak* about the subject, the voices of the people who *might feel* the most concerned, i.e. the local authority officers, the senior teachers who sit on the special panels and the educational psychologists with specialist roles, all remain silent. If they - if we - cannot speak out then the public will have to rely solely on information provided on the government website. This prompts a narrative recollection of me as a young(ish) psychologist determined to take up the mantle and a search for truth.

I once made a request to the local authority where I was working, using the Freedom of Information Act. I asked for details about the numbers of children excluded from school in that particular local authority. My request resulted in an impromptu supervision session with my line manager who reminded me that it was not the role of the educational psychologist to make Freedom of Information requests to the local authority which employs him. There are presumably good reasons for this. Taking a different tack, I telephoned a Senior Information Officer employed by the same local authority. I knew him personally and asked him for precise figures of permanently excluded children and he told me that he would email them to me directly. Not wishing to place him in a difficult position, I clarified that I had no consultancy role as such and only wanted the figures that the public could access. "Oh, *those* figures!" he said and he pointed me to the government website.

To capture the contemporary trend, I can report that the BBC News (on 4 October 2016) made an effort to interpret for the general public (as they do) the rapid rise in permanent exclusions in England. Between 2011 and 2015 figures for children permanently excluded from school

increased from 4,630 to 5,800 with wide, regional differences. Barnsley and Middlesbrough saw a 300% rise between those two target years. This problematic situation may not all be bad news, however, as the BBC reported: “Some councils where large rises have been recorded said the increase reflected a greater willingness to tackle ‘poor behaviour’” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-37340042>). This news release occurred on the second day of the 2016 Conservative Party Conference. Was that just a coincidence? Is it possible that the increase in permanent exclusions, particularly in economically poorer local authorities, is an embarrassment to the sitting government? Is it possible that the government prevails upon the BBC to issue a morally-acceptable interpretation of a dramatic increase in school exclusions in deprived areas of Britain during Conservative Party Conference? Or am I being paranoid?

I decided quite early when writing this thesis that if I was to undertake any sort of meaningful study of the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school it would not be by fixating on difficult-to-pin-down numbers, Freedom of Information requests made to reticent local authority officers or to rely on information provided on government websites. To continue on that path would risk meeting all the challenges reported by McNab (2007) in his aptly-entitled article, *Desperately seeking data*; and by Thomas and Russell (2009). I decided to severely limit my subscription to what I have called ‘familiar and traditional’ epistemologies and methodologies, which are discussed later in this chapter. But I have not entirely finished with numbers. First I pause to reflect on the stigma attached to permanent exclusion from school from the child’s perspective.

### **(iii) the stigma of permanent exclusion**



This is a note about social injustice. The suffering of the child resulting from stigma attached to being permanently excluded from school is discussed in the works of Berridge *et al* (2001), Callwood (2013), Oakley (2015) and others. Some parents find the appeals process stressful and legalistic (Harris *et al*, 2000). Some find it alien to them (Wood, 2012). Here I make one personal observation: the excluded child goes on, in later life, to experience public (or private), significant (or mild); and life-long (or decreasing) shame about the matter. This is because once an exclusion is formally registered it takes on the nature of a social truth. Whether the child's problem behaviour, emotional outbursts or social difficulties in the past *caused* his eventual permanent exclusion devolves to arguments of social construction formed around belief structures and events that occurred. I am using the term, 'social construction', quite loosely, somewhat akin to what Gergen (*ibid*) describes as: "human constructions around which we organise our lives" (p.xvi). My use of this term also has personal origins for me in the personal constructs Kelly (1955) wrote about and other sources, for example Bauer and Gaskell (1999). Other more recent sources are Mills (1998) and Mallon (2003). The history of a child's 'behaviour problems' surely has many discrete event points, each of which provides arguments for and against permanent exclusion. But once the final decision of 'guilty' is made, history - although not necessarily the government website - will record the permanent exclusion and it will be seen as a social truth and a deserved one – even for those children for whom the exclusion might have been/ could have been/ should have been avoided. This is the price paid by the child. I would suggest that it too high a price. But why do we find the subjects of social identification, ejection and exclusion so difficult to discuss?

About such matters I observe a triad of belief tenets, visualised as regions of a triangle with the points representing extreme beliefs and the inner area representing spaces for the overlap of less-extreme beliefs. The tone of this thesis locates it close to the extreme point of the first tenet, i.e. that the situation of the individual is unique and precious and should be treated as such. According to this tenet a presumptuous decision to permanently exclude a child from school is seen as the wrong thing to do. The second tenet would hold that life is complex, social events are necessarily messy and that the social identification of a child as unfit to benefit from mainstream education (as the quote at the beginning of chapter two suggests) is an unpleasant but necessary symptom of a society struggling to cope with itself. According to this tenet every form of social exclusion should be applied rarely, with the utmost reluctance and only to the people who might deserve it. The third belief tenet is that society is necessarily ordered, structured and governed by those best suited to lead. According to this tenet social mechanisms need to be in place to identify the inevitable and predictable number of miscreants and punish them accordingly. According to this tenet there is an underclass in society (MacDonald, 1997) and they have to be dealt with. This tenet is given life by Foucault (1977) in the chapter of his book entitled *The gentle way in punishment*. This third tenet does not deal in 'false positives' (this thesis, ch3v) – all individuals who are found guilty of a crime by the proper agents of society are justifiably punished. I argue later in this thesis that any critical review of a dubious institutional practice - such as using the method offered by Clarke (2004), called *structured judgement methods* - would not only expose the inadequacy of the evidence gathered, the limitations of the investigation and the unprincipled nature of the decision made - it would also identify the people who made the decision and expose their belief tenets.

Maintenance of the *status quo* demands that such reviews do not take place and if they do their findings should be ignored - as are the findings of the Children's Commissioner (*ibid*).

I, like the reader, hold personal belief tenets. A lot of my critical research is flawed. And I use numbers all the time. Not only have I have used them to number the pages of this thesis, numbers are still required generally in life. Later in this thesis Jaynes (1976) describes numbers as metaphors (this thesis, ch7iv). But numbers are sometimes metaphors armed with teeth. We cannot ignore them completely but we should always factor in their fluid, transitional, persuasive, negotiated and sometimes misleading nature.

#### **(iv) problems with truth, evidence, human experience and definitions**

##### ***numbers as evidence***

Any reported number that pertains to something that falls within the penumbra of an area of social taboo or challenges the *status quo* or brings potential shame on the collecting agency might be treated with caution. Applying numbers to complex, human phenomena in general is a doubtful venture. Consider the curious case of zero: imagine a straight number line stretching from zero to positive infinity and zero to negative infinity in the other direction. Following the left to right convention, on the right side of the number that we call 'one' (and metaphorically represented by the sound, *wun*, and the character '1', presumably of Syrian origin) is the number we call '2'. At the left side of the number '1' is the number we call 'zero' and represent as '0'. But is zero a number? To the left of '0' is the number we call 'minus 1'. This brings us to the logical conclusion that the distance between '0' and '1' is '1'. We should ask: is '1' now a size-entity or is it a distance-entity? Or is it both or either depending upon your preference? In mathematics the distance between zero and one is accepted as '1' but in life the distance

between them can be all important or utterly meaningless. Adam, the child described in the fictitious case story that this chapter begins with, either was or was not permanently excluded from school once, attracting either the number '1' or the number '0' once his exclusion was revoked. But how did Adam and his mother feel about the matter? Does a '1' or a '0' cover it? Would the actual number reflect his life experience?

Nowhere is the collapse of reason in the face of human obsession with numbers more obvious than in the use of behaviour rating scales. Such scales were designed to measure the parameters of human norms in terms of an individual's behaviour. Sometimes, they are used to locate a child about whom adults have concern somewhere along a distribution range from low to high parameter. There are usually negative behavioural, emotional or personality features associated with ratings that occur far beyond the median score range. The origin of such scales lies in the psychosocial model of human developmental. Some well-known behaviour rating scales include the Bristol Social Adjustment Guide (BSG) (Stott, 1966), the Young Adult Self-Report and Young Adult Behavior Checklist (YASR) (Achenbach, 1997b); and the Connors' rating scale (Connors, 2008). One recently-added attitudinal rating scale much used in English schools is the Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) (Williams and Whithome, 2003), which has attracted much local authority spending but little criticism - except in an unpublished report by this author (Forde, 2007). There are problems with using such scales, at the point of construction, scoring and at the endpoint of decision-making.

For example, two prompt questions in the BSG are: 'he lies without compunction' and 'he keeps a suspicious distance'. Many parents would object to the tenor of these propositions - if they were aware of them. Regarding questions used in PASS one pupil, who was at risk of exclusion,

responded to my question: 'Do you feel like you belong at this school?' by returning it to me:

"Do I belong here, Mr Forde?" In terms of decision-making, behaviour-rating scales succumb to the inevitable pathologization of the child. As Parker and Foster (1995) note, a recursive illogic seems to apply: "... a tautological inference occurs in which the disorder has come to be deduced from the behaviour which it is supposed to explain" (p.78). When this is applied to the child 'with behaviour, difficulties' who is destined to be excluded, the argument goes something like this: "He is clearly unfit for mainstream school - he is antisocial and, to prove it, I have rated him on the BSG (or YASR, PASS or Connors). His scores reveal extreme antisocial tendencies. He is proven to be antisocial, which confirms my initial feeling, by the way". To make matters worse the adult with the 'feeling' and the 'proof' is often the same adult who purchased the rating scale in the first place. The wholeillogical journey is complete when the rater is found to be socially close to the decision-making body which subsequently decides that 'drastic intervention' is required. The decision to permanently exclude - or similar persuasions, to attend the PRU, to move to an AP, to change schools, to consider home education - is then made.

I would argue that, as applied social scientists, educational psychologists are too keen to accept the validity of numbers as evidence. We willingly and silently accept the blending, bending and distortion of human reality to make those numbers appear small or large, critical or appeasing as required. When it comes to numbers in relation to permanent exclusions the social dimension that is usually invoked is a narrowly-defined aspect of individual behaviour, i.e. *the child's behaviour* and decidedly *not* the influence of the social context the child finds himself in. Here the numbers that excite us most are: how bad on a scale of one to ten is his behaviour? -

please provide a corroborating behaviour log. In how many situational realms do his behaviour problems manifest themselves? - and for how long? And this despite the behavioural interventions mounted - by the way, can you list them? - can you cost them? - how entrenched is that behaviour? What begins as a suspicion gives way to a measurement, followed by a diagnosis, resulting in an unrelenting tendency to pathologize and then exclude. Almost any quote from the entire chapter, entitled *generalised punishment*, from Foucault (1977) is relevant here but I will select just one:

“In effect the offence opposes an individual to the entire social body; in order to punish him, society has the right to oppose him in its entirety. It is an unequal struggle: on one side are all the forces, all the power, all the rights. And this is how it should be, since the defence of each individual is involved. Thus a formidable right to punish is established, since the offender becomes the common enemy. Indeed, he is worse than an enemy, for it is within society that he delivers his blows - he is nothing less than a traitor, a ‘monster’. How could society not have an absolute right over him? How could it not demand, quite simply, his elimination?” (p.90).

I recognise that I have not provided a full critique of the limitations of positivist methodology here. I have made a start. I have described one side of a complex picture. For example, there are some encouraging moves towards moderating this positivist legacy of efficient ‘people sorting’ methods. Nerlich (2004) and others (Todd *et al*, 2004) have examined the recent emergence of psychological methods that encompass more ‘people-friendly’ approaches, typified by qualitative methods of inquiry. I have provided a one-sided view of positivist methodology. This might be my way of coming to terms with my personal guilt. Historically, in

my research, I have been more moved by the positivist tradition than authors of measurement tools that I have critiqued here (Forde, 1977, 1987, 1997).

In schools behaviour problems are usually seen as located within individual children. These behaviours are witnessed, discussed, recorded, counted, deemed 'serious' or 'significant' and sometimes found to require drastic intervention. In some cases this process occurs without parents even knowing about it (Lamb, 2009). We psychologists become complicit in these deceptive practices when we move effortlessly and without guilt from a world of analogue representation, where children are innocent, different, learning and surviving, through a transition phase during which analogue becomes digital; and onwards into a cold, unfeeling world of numbers, metaphors, prejudices, a place where decisions about guilt, pathology, and lack of social 'fit' lead to unavoidable exclusion. (The use of the words 'analogue' and 'digital' here derive from an idea by Dawkins (1995), chapter one).

Consider Adam's story: by the time the educational psychologist arrived on the scene the local authority cogs were turning and the march towards finding 'a more appropriate educational setting' for him was well underway. The process of removal had a unseen dynamic of its own. Adam was once, as all children are, young, innocent and full of promise. Then, suddenly, at the age of 9 years, he was old before his time, the bearer of an irredeemable behavioural pathology and requiring more help than his high achieving primary school could reasonably offer him. When the event is permanent exclusion from school '1' is a big number, as any adult who was permanently excluded during their school years will know. The difference between '1' and 'zero' here can be life-changing. The difference between '1' and '2' might not be as significant, as the fictional story of Laura (this thesis, ch5i) describes.

### ***definitions***

'A definition gives an essence to the thing,' so saith Aristotle (Cassidy, 1967). A precise definition of what is meant by permanent exclusion from school is, however, difficult to pin down. The two definitions already given in this chapter make a start. But any definition inevitably transforms the 'numbers' question. What, for example, is the difference between a legitimate exclusion (as in the fictional story John that occurs in chapter four) and an informal agreement between a headteacher and a parent to "arrange for your child to enrol at another high school otherwise he will be permanently excluded?" When it comes to permanent exclusion I suggest that there is a crisis of definition, even though on the surface it would seem a fairly simple sequence of events, as depicted below.

#### ***list 1: the chronology of events surrounding permanent exclusion from school***

- (i) the child 'misbehaves' (even if his expression of 'misbehaviour' is more reasonable than its absence given the physical, social or psychological context the child finds himself in);
- (ii) in doing so he contravenes the school safety, behaviour and discipline policies;
- (iii) 'his' misbehaviour continues despite reasonable efforts by the school to help him  
Including consultations with key people, including parents;
- (iv) reports, views and impressions circulate and accumulate;
- (v) as the situation of the child is more closely monitored;
- (vi) eventually a 'tipping point' or 'decision point' is reached and the decision to permanently exclude is made by the headteacher or senior management team;
- (vii) the local authority is duly notified (usually this step happens much earlier so that



- 'negotiations' can begin - my impression is that these negotiations are private and not made public, no minutes are kept and there is thus minimal accountability);
- (viii) a letter is written to the child's parents or guardians confirming the permanent exclusion and that the child's name will be removed from the school register;
  - (ix) there is a deadline date set for the parent to appeal against the decision; and
  - (x) efforts are immediately made to educate the child in another school or PRU;
  - (xi) for some children this process may repeat itself several times.

The sequence of events above is described in a different way by Osler, Watling & Busher (2001):

“Although schools provide a reason for the permanent exclusion of an individual child, this immediate ‘trigger’ leading to exclusion is usually matched by a long case history. The cause for concern might be a child's behaviour, his or her academic achievements, social circumstances or a combination of these factors. Headteachers were generally agreed that the reason they provided at the time of the exclusion was simply one event in a long build-up of events” (p.66).

This sequence described in list 1, surely, describes the situation before, during and after typical, classical, full and proper permanent exclusion from school? Two definition of permanent exclusion are given above (this thesis, ch3ii). But I would argue that the definition is necessarily associated with three other dimensions of attribution - evidence, human meaning and 'truth'. I place the word 'truth' in inverted commas because there is a very good argument that the 'truth' in relation to a permanent exclusion from school is a convenient social construction. I recognise that, by the same argument, definition, human meaning and evidence are also personal or social constructions. In general, provided we are given a firm explanation of any

three of these dimensions of attribution, the fourth is more or less sorted. This requires a little more explanation following a cautionary note.

Numerous times in this thesis I have found myself straying from the questions of central concern. I alight on new fields of philosophical insight, unavoidably so. I stumble upon the writings of a contemporary philosopher whose works far surpass my own, suggesting that I have strayed too far. For example, in discussing truth, evidence, human experience and how we define the terms of meaning I recently found a newspaper article by Anthony Kennedy, which describes more eloquently than I can what I am trying to get at in the story below. Kennedy notes: “Any society has to perform at least two big related tasks — raising the young and pursuing of the good” (Anthony Kennedy and the Privatization of Meaning, in New York Times, 28 June 2018). The general area I am covering in this thesis I now recognise overlaps considerably with the seminal works of Bakhtin (1981), Demasio (1999) and Gergen (2009) but I cannot rewind the clock and do sufficient justice to these philosophers.

If Adam's story had been real I doubt that Adam's mother would agree about the **human experience** and **truth** of the events that she and Adam experienced. Once she agreed for Adam to transfer to special school the number '1' was not added to the government statistical record of permanent exclusions by the local authority - the statistic reverted to '0'. Therefore, in Adam's story, the **definition** of permanent exclusion did not apply and the government database was not updated. Adam's mother might have held a different view about matters. The way I wrote the story, the behaviour of the school and the local authority left her no choice. I admit that in writing this fiction I weaved in a desired truth but at this point I am confused about which fiction is the most credible – my own typified in the story of Adam or the fiction

woven into the government's website? The events of permanent exclusion (at least in England) are sometimes stage-managed and retrospectively redefined. Official recording of such events is a form of window dressing designed to fit the numbers game, a game impressed upon local authorities by the government. And, according to table 1, the government is winning the numbers game. As Cookson (1994) aptly writes: "... politics is not only the art of the possible, but also the art of packaging small victories in the ideological wrappings of grand accomplishments"(p.119).

### ***perspectives on problem behaviour***

Miller (2004), writing about societal responses to problem behaviour in children in schools, describes six epistemological perspectives. The perspective that seems to fit the bill in England today is the organizational psychology one. Put simply, an organizational psychology perspective relies on a machine analogy, where the entry of children (and staff) into school and their progress therein is seen as a factory in operation, producing 'things' or making products. According to the machine analogy, over time a predictable proportion of the materials required to make the final product will be found to be substandard and removed by Quality Control so as to ensure the efficient function of the factory system. Quality Control can be read into the quote at the beginning of chapter two and the use of machine metaphors seems apt. But if school were a factory where tinned beans were the product we would not expect the rejected beans themselves or their forebears to raise issues of ethics to the manager of Quality Control. The beans and their forebears remain largely silent - ejection is done *to* them not *for* them. I write here on behalf of the rejected beans.

### **(v) the problems with 'familiar and traditional' methodologies and epistemologies**

Organizational psychology research relies on epistemologies and methodologies that I have called 'familiar and traditional'. It is time to clarify what I mean by these words before abandoning the inverted commas. An epistemology might be described as *a way of knowing* what the problem is. It provides a way of expressing in words, ideas or numbers how a problem might be identified and studied. It indicates in a logical way how the problem might be remedied or managed. Such ways of knowing can help us determine what to do to improve a situation. A methodology might be seen as a way of detecting or measuring the phenomenon revealed by the epistemological premise.

What do I mean by 'traditional' in this context? I am focussing here mainly on social science, in particular a science concerned with the problems human beings may experience in society. A piece of research that might be held up as 'traditional' in this regard is that by Florence Nightingale in her Royal Commission report of 1858, which showed clearly the scale of avoidable deaths on the battlefields of the Crimea due to underfunding (<http://www.florence-nightingale-avenging-angel.co.uk/GraphicsPaper/Graphics.htm> evidence downloaded on 11 October 2017). Her research relied on numerical and descriptive data. The underlying epistemology explored the influence of cause and effect of minute microbes invading the wounds of soldiers injured on the battlefield. Nightingale's methodology is familiar today, brought to life by the use of parametric statistics in most health and much social science research. Over time epistemologies, methodologies and statistical forms have grown, become more sophisticated and abundant. Indeed alternative forms have flourished (see Siegel, 1957, for a full review of nonparametric statistics). In the last century the rise of quantitative-based research applied to all things human, typified in the works of Pavlov (1906), Watson (1913) and Skinner (1953),

provide examples that rely on traditional epistemologies and methodologies much in favour by social science researchers. There is an argument that the thrust of positivist science gathered social science in its wake. In terms of 'sorting people into boxes' this began much earlier with a direct inspirational route between Darwin ([1859] 1985), Galton (1869), Spearman (1904) and Binet and Simon (1916). The last two of these locates individual and intellectual ability firmly in the positivist, nomothetic and numerical tradition. In terms of research into permanent exclusion from school, which could only have begun one hundred years ago, all of the works cited towards the end of this chapter and in the discussion chapter rely on 'traditional' epistemologies and methodologies.

What do I mean by 'familiar?' The research of Berridge *et al* (2001), Forde (1997) and Noguera (2003) provide ready examples taken from a much wider field of, indeed now limitless, research into social issues. I would describe such inquiries as 'familiar' according to the following criteria: (i) they describe only briefly, if at all, the epistemological base of the research they undertake – the epistemology is presumed to be understood and accepted by the reader. In contradistinction the methodology is often described in minute detail; (ii) and it includes an argument for the sometimes-tenuous link between the subject studied (i.e. the social problem itself) and the associated variables measured. This argument contains comments about those variables selected and those controlled for, and an argument for validity is made ; and (iii) the general format of the research reflects the current fashion, i.e. the epistemologies and methodologies are familiar and acceptable to the readers.

An apt example which exposes the impotence of the familiar and traditional approach to research is provided by Hayden (2006). She reported national research into the links between

children's special educational needs, other needs and their risk of permanent exclusion. Hayden focussed on the plight of primary school children and her arguments cover almost every point raised here. There are problems with Hayden's (*ibid*) report, however. She conceptualises the matter as driven by child pathology - the faulty beans, if you like. Her main point is that children who are excluded have unmet needs. I move immediately to Hayden's suggestions for improvement, which typify my concerns with the familiar and traditional epistemology that underpins her research, i.e. it is unremarkable. Hayden advises: "... more expert understanding and help ..." (p.41). "... good classroom management skills ..." (p.42). "... imaginative schemes ..." (p.42). And: "... intervening in more than one areas of a child's life" (p.43). The four suggestions focus on child pathology embedded within a mechanistic view of the education system, i.e. the school-is-a-machine model, as described by Miller (2004) under the banner of 'organisational psychology' (p.93). Hayden's advice might be reworded as: "teachers should become better qualified in machine operation, they should shine the machine more often; and intervene more skillfully and imaginatively when the machine breaks down" - especially when a substandard batch of beans from either Barnsley or Middlesbrough enters the cycle.

I would further argue that the familiar and traditional forms of inquiry distort and denigrate the human perspective. Often they are impotent. What good is a study based on an epistemology and its associated methodology if it cannot change that which it reveals as socially unacceptable? A quote by Cookson (*ibid*) encapsulates this concern: "Analysis without prescription renders the pursuit of grounded knowledge a game of intellectual hide-and-seek" (p.117). A central argument of this thesis is that much of the research into school exclusion relies on belief positions and inquiry methods that are notably weak in terms of changing the

situations they describe. What value lies in a methodology that does nothing to affect the outcomes for the most vulnerable people and yet make the 'investigative' work of the researcher easier, more logical and more suitable for publication? No wonder I struggled to write this thesis. No wonder I decided to spend my times working as an educational psychologist concentrating on the plight of the vulnerable child before me rather than arguing for system change. Let me spend a moment highlighting this further and confirming my allegiance to the first tenet as described above.

If an individual is considered to be innocent at any point in his life - presumably when he is a foetus - then the argument pertains that each behaviour choice he, as a child, once born, makes at each subsequent moment in his life as life progresses must, according to any logical theory of social action, have been made by him for 'good' or 'necessary' reasons, i.e. within the parameters of his own perspective. The mistakes we all make are part of life. To believe that some children are evil at conception or at birth is something we should reject outright - although Skinner (1971) did not reject this outright and explored the notion that genetic predisposition might predict criminal behaviour. We can postulate that the child's behaves in certain ways for adaptive reasons, inspired by survival or simply meeting his own needs, as Maslow (2012) has described. That we arrive at a time when the child's behaviour is socially constructed as being 'very bad' cannot entirely be through any fault of his own. His current behaviour might always be understood as a consequence of prior experiences, his learning from those experiences; and the particular situation he faces at the moment or faced in the past (because memories continue to haunt him).

The above paragraph paints a one-sided, perhaps Utopian, picture because it makes it difficult to explain the existence of children who *decide* to misbehave when given every opportunity and reason to behave properly. But is it reasonable to accept an incidence rate of 5,800 such children (and very likely *far more* than 5,800) *every year* in England; children who, through their own free wills, their own free choices, *decided* to misbehave to the degree and type where they are justifiably permanently excluded? The fact that the number remains remarkably stable, growing annually by about 0.01 percent (generally on a par with inflation), could only be viewed as the regular expression of a negative genetic propensity (i.e. the third tenet) if it manifested itself in all economic classes, in all geographical regions, in all races and all creeds of English society. A simple Chi-squared test would demonstrate that, even at the local authority level, a disproportionate number of our most vulnerable children are permanently excluded year on year. Is it possible that Quality Control is itself faulty? Are we, in England, presiding over factories called schools where the number of 'false positives' – by which I mean the children unjustly and unconscionably excluded - remains stable, rising steadily at 0.01 per cent per year? Is this all about bad children behaving badly despite our good intentions? Is it a mere coincidence that the number of children permanently excluded from our schools does not go down but rises inexorably year on year? Any decently constructed time-series analysis would demonstrate this gradual, upward trend. Of course the trend would then need to be explained.

As an aside I note that the number of people sent to English prisons also rises year on year. So, too, the imbalance of wealth distribution in England grows year on year. And the number of homeless people increases. Hospital waiting times increase as do the number of people committing suicide. Are these patterns indicative of something more sinister in society or of



something more neurotic growing inside of me? I would argue that the stability of the statistic for permanent exclusions from English schools is not explained by a growing genetic pathology more prevalent in poorer, mixed-race children that happen to live in places like Barnsley or Middlesbrough. It is explained by subscription to a social code played out at government and local authority level, a code that manages the *evidence* (usually numbers) and adjusts the *definitions* to be able to report a palatable *human experience* intended to disguise an inconvenient *truth*. The inconvenient *truth* is that a concealed, large and growing number of children are unnecessarily, unjustly, unfairly, illegally and immorally permanently excluded from school year on year. According to the dictates of social taboo, the matter is not widely discussed. To what purpose, we might ask? I will turn the message around: the data in table 1 disguises two inconvenient truths: (i) the number of children excluded is not under control - the number of children reported to be excluded is; and (ii) permanent exclusions are not diminishing year on year - they are increasing and they are subject to unresearched influences. I wonder which story does the reader believe here? The numbers in table 1 span years of Conservative government. Space does not permit a party-in-government examination of the matter over the years. Below I summarise research that relies on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. Most research highlights the problems we face. I report it to establish that there is a case to answer. I report it to expose English schools' version of society's "will to punish," as Parsons (2005) calls it.

**table 1 permanent exclusion figures for England, 2008 to 2016**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>% children px-ed from school</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Fragment from report (i.e. embedded truth)</b>
2008/09	0.09	6550	".. the number has decreased 19.4% .." (SFR22/2010)
2009/10	not given	5740	".. the number has decreased .." (SFR17/2011)
2010/11	0.07	5080	".. the number has decreased .." (SFR17/2012)
2011/12	0.07	5170	".. a steady decline in permanent exclusions.." (SFR29/2013)
2012/13	0.06	not given	".. the number .. has fallen considerably .." (SFR28/2014)
2013/14	0.06	4950	"Longer term trends had shown a general decrease..." (SFR27/2015)
2014/15	0.07	5800	".. the overall rate has increased slightly .." (SFR26/2016)
2015/16	0.08	6685	".. the overall rate of permanent exclusion has increased .." (SFR35/2017)

**(vi) research that challenges the practice of making permanent exclusions**

There exists a wide field of research that holds the practice to account. I have limited my review to the issues of cost, social justice, the vulnerability of the excluded child, the self-fulfilling prophecy that is activated; and the risk that the first exclusion may lead to further forms of social exclusion later in life. There is some evidence presented that the practice is confusing and hurtful to the excluded children and that Looked After Children suffer permanent exclusion at a rate disproportionate to their numbers in society.

The first argument relates to economic cost. Parsons and Castle (2006), in a detailed review of cost expenditure resulting from permanent exclusions across six local authorities in England, found the cost to the nation of excluding 12,458 children in 1994/95 was just under 50 million pounds. This was approximately ten times the cost of supporting the same number of children in mainstream schools. The figures quoted do not take into account the unseen costs encountered by support services, such as involving the educational psychology service, the behaviour support service or the NHS. The true cost of permanent exclusion is unknown, lying somewhere between 50 million and (twenty times this) a billion pounds per year if, as I suspect, permanent exclusion in all its guises affects 100,000 children per year.

The second argument relates to issues of social justice. We need go no further than the information posted on the Department for Education website (DfE, 2016b), which clearly shows that the children most likely to be permanently excluded from school are also most likely to bear the following indicators: they are male, have special educational needs, are of a minority ethnic origin, receive free school meals and live in the poorest economic regions of England.

The logical argument pertaining to social justice is that decisions made across regions of

England to permanently exclude children from school should be fair, equitable and take into account demographic, educational and ethnic patterns. They do not, as the BBC report (this thesis, ch3ii) shows. I admit that this is a simplification of a complex matter.

The third argument relates to child vulnerability. The child who is excluded is much more likely to be subsequently described as 'missing' from education. The risks of being 'missing' include vulnerability to exploitation, health deficits, mental health issues and isolation from support agencies. As Visser *et al* (2005) note: '(permanently excluded pupils) figure prominently amongst the “missing” ' (p.46. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability). In a similar vein Firth and Horrocks ([1996] 2003) point out that the risks of suffering permanent exclusion are disproportionately realised by those who are part of the 60,000 children in England Looked After.

The fourth argument is that the act itself is illogical. It instigates a self-fulfilling prophecy not only for the child excluded but for the society that the child is part of. Allan (2006), in a review of Scottish legislation about SEN and exclusion, describes how educators, researchers in education and politicians are trapped in a vicious cycle of re-inventing a negative policy wheel. The message applies to England also. Not only in school exclusion but in society in general we continue to identify the individuals who show disability, need and difference. We identify them, marginalise them and then punish them. The repetition of the illogic of school exclusion is as Allan describes: “The quest for certainty and the calculable within educational policy and practice” (p.126). Many other writers have broached this subject of punishment in its broader, societal context, in particular Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982).

The fifth argument refers to the inability of the local authority, or of society itself, to properly inspect this problematic social phenomenon. People suffer when society makes mistakes. I once wrote a discussion paper urging critical review of the KS4 AP system in the local authority where I then worked. I first described the problems that I saw and then introduced Clarke's *structured design methodology* (Clarke, 2004). This is a well-described and straightforward tool that could be used 'in house' to investigate the 'false positives', i.e. the situation faced by children who perhaps should not have been persuaded to take the AP pathway. As I mentioned in chapter two, about twenty KS4 students per year encountered difficulties in the AP system. Clarke's methodology is a form of 'cold case analysis,' involving looking at the details relating to the children permanently excluded from school who, it later being discovered, might not need to have been. My purpose was instructive: to demonstrate to my line managers that we could discover the sorts of information missing from what clearly was a 'murky' decision-making process. We could prevent avoidable exclusions from mainstream high schools that led to the AP outcome. I did this was because I had personally met many children whose exclusions were questionable. I recognise now that, in part, my paper was written as a self-righteous act of emotional sublimation. I submitted the discussion paper that no senior manager had requested. No manager chose to acknowledge its receipt and it lies buried in dead email traffic in some far-away local authority - but I have provided a summary for the interested reader (this thesis, list 2, ch4vi). I was holding onto 'the last straw' in terms of relying on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies in my search for reason in relation to permanent exclusion from school.

The sixth argument relates to the long-term damage to the excludee, attributable to him being permanently excluded from school. The Research, Development and Statistics Directorate produced a report commissioned by the Home Office that highlighted the risks consequent on being permanently excluded from school (Berridge *et al*, 2001). Three summary notes and one note of caution give a flavour of what I found:

“117 (young people out of 263 cases closely examined) had no recorded offences prior to permanent exclusion but had a record of offending following permanent exclusion” (Berridge *et al*, 2001, Executive Summary, p.v).

And:

“.. there was a time-lag between permanent exclusion and offending which makes any straightforward causal relationship between the two events difficult to establish” (*ibid*, p.v).

And:

“.. qualitative interviews (with 28 pupils) suggested that permanent exclusion tended to trigger a complex chain of events which served to loosen the young person's affiliation and commitment to a conventional way of life .. characterized by: .. a re-casting of identity, a changed relationship with parents and siblings; the erosion of prosocial peers and adults .. and heightened vulnerability to police surveillance” (*ibid*, p.vi).

And:

“The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy)” (*ibid*, front cover of report).

The final argument covered here - the premium of space requires me to apply a limit - considers the effect upon our children from witnessing the punitive actions of the adults who permanently exclude a child from school. This argument is explored further in chapter five. In a paper entitled, *What shall we tell the children?*, Humphrey *et al* (1998) describes the effect on our children of indoctrinating them to the questionable dogma of adults. Humphrey focusses on religious instruction but I would argue that his arguments apply equally to children observing the familiar ritual of permanent school exclusion. Permanent exclusion is not just about the children who are excluded and about the reasons why they are excluded - it is also about *the children who watch*. About the suggestibility of children in general, Humphrey quotes the Jesuit master who wisely noted: "If I have the teaching of children up to seven years of age or thereabouts, I care not who has them afterwards, they are mine for life" (p.785).

The most recent figures reported by government show that the number of permanent and fixed term exclusions from primary schools is currently rising. *The Guardian* reports ([www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/20/number-children-expelled-english-schools](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/20/number-children-expelled-english-schools)) that, of the 6,800 children excluded in 2015/2016, 1,185 were of primary age and included 475 who were seven year old or under and 50 four year-olds. The report notes almost 25,000 children aged seven or under were temporarily excluded. Considering that primary school class sizes now top 30 children per class I calculate that over 38,000 primary school children per year will *watch* the spectacle of permanent exclusion unfolding in their schools. The number of child observers increases dramatically in secondary school years. In eleven years of compulsory education we will ensure that about one third of the entire pupil population of England shall bear witness to this spectacle of social removal. Perhaps we are preparing them for adult life in

a socially divided England? In regard of social taboo, managing local authority shame and upholding the *status quo* (and I might add keeping a stiff upper lip) my comments here might seem inflammatory. I imagine the view of this English problem from the prosperous nations of Europe and beyond is less obscure.

**(vii) summary of this chapter**

In this chapter I have told the story of school exclusion from emotive, cynical and logical perspectives, in that order - or, as Knapton (2016) describes: *ergo, pathos, logos*. I began with a fictional story of a boy called Adam. I then explored the fiasco of the numbers debate, outlining the difficulties introduced by obscure definitions and manufactured meanings. Finally I established that there was a case to answer by decrying the practice of permanent exclusion from school on the grounds of cost, social justice, reason and the harm caused to vulnerable children. In doing so, I have cited research based on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. I find these forms of inquiry impotent in terms of changing matters. The government website paints a glossy and misleading picture of the situation. The Report of the government's Children's Commissioner (2014) suggests that this is not the case. Much seemingly 'good' research closes with Platonic words envisaging future improvements in a Utopian world. But the words drift away silently into the evening air, as do those of the Children's Commissioner herself:

“The Government should conduct research to identify the full extent of unlawful exclusions .. with a view to identifying the scale of activity, and lessons for both national policy making and school accountability which arise. The research findings should be .. used to inform data collection in the future” (Point 9 in Executive Summary).



Time proves the Commissioner's sentiments to be ineffective. In 2013/2014 the figure for permanent exclusions in England was 4,950 children (table 1). The year afterwards the figure was 5,800. The figure for the most recent year available is 6,685. The critical impact of the report on the practice seems very low, given that her report was compiled between those years. What is missing from the report are words that state unequivocally what should be obvious - that unbiased research *will* be funded, that unjust permanent exclusions from school *will* be uncovered and that widespread use of exclusions *will* be prevented. In cases that fall short of a reasonable standard, appropriate government, local authority and school bodies *will* be held to account. The problem *will* be dealt with, a specific date of implementation *will* be identified and adequate funding *will* be made available. The most vulnerable children *will* be protected. There is a notable absence of these *wills* at any level. Malaise is echoed at local authority and school level. There are no plans to change the *status quo*. There is no will to challenge this or any form of social exclusion. There is no light at the end of this particular tunnel. Dismay and disillusionment (unless masked by self-delusion) await those expecting systemic change.

If familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies lead nowhere it is necessary to look elsewhere. It is time to consider alternative perspectives on school exclusion. From this point onwards I search for reason and hope in what seems to be a hopeless place. The next four chapters consider alternative epistemologies, new ways of thinking, each applied to the mysteries surrounding this pernicious form of social exclusion. I use these as keys to unlock my thoughts and to find reason where reason notably does not exist. But where epistemology is new and challenging, methodological exactitude is necessarily weak. This is a limitation of this

thesis. All new and ambitious formulations of reality relegate methodology to the observational, descriptive and speculative level. But something new is required.

This chapter has explored the disjoint between published research and purposeful social action. Purposeful action is notably missing. Why? I think that one reason is that senior figures in local and governmental positions are being manipulated. Unconscious forces prevail upon them. Their attentions, motivations, perceptions, behaviours and even their words are being shaped by unseen forces. In subsequent chapters I explore some of these unseen forces.

## chapter four: the work of Darwin

Darwin ([1874] 2009) wrote:

“That he (man) is capable of comparably greater and more rapid improvement than is any other animal, admits of no dispute; and this is mainly due to his power of speaking and handing down his acquired knowledge” (p.79. My insertion of the word 'man' to improve readability).

In this chapter aspects of Darwin's work are presented and applied to the social phenomenon of school exclusion. I cite Darwin [1859] (1985) and [1874] (2009). The reader might ask, having applied so much criticism towards familiar and traditional methods of inquiry, why would I begin my exploration citing a positivist *par excellence*? My answer is because his arguments are so cogent, familiar to readers and they lend themselves readily to the subject of permanent exclusion from school. Darwin's work provides an important perspective on the matter of how we deal with problem behaviour in society and in schools today. The chapter is organised thus:

- (i) fictional story: John
- (ii) Darwin in the Age of Enlightenment and a brief critique of his work
- (iii) does the theory of evolution apply to modern humans?
- (iv) Darwin on society, morality and God
- (v) anthropomorphic hyperbole
- (vi) does Darwin's theory of evolution inform the study of school exclusion?
- (vii) the auguries of science
- (viii) summary of this chapter

**(i) fictional story: John**

A view that permeates this thesis is that permanently excluding a child from school should be avoided wherever possible. But sometimes it is a difficult thing to avoid, as this story portrays. A friend of mine, a wise and child-centred educational psychologist, once spoke about the matter. He described a hypothetical case, a child showing seemingly-intractable behaviour problems in school despite the many interventions of help offered. The story concludes with a permanent exclusion. Here are the words of my colleague:

“Suppose you were the psychologist assigned to a high school. They knew you well, you had worked there for many years and they tended to discuss children at risk of permanent exclusion with you before they actually excluded. This fictitious Year 8 boy - let’s call him John - had experienced problems since entering high school four terms earlier. He had already been referred to the Educational Psychology Service, the Behaviour Support Service; and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were involved. John had a long behaviour log and on a daily basis showed significant behavioural unrest. Many interventions had been tried – two of them suggested by you - but with no success. John was allocated a high level of in-class support but most of the problems reported occurred during unstructured times. John’s behaviour in school was challenging and disruptive despite the strategies used to help him. No one could predict the triggers. Towards the end of Year 7 he had been placed at a Pupil Referral Unit for one school term. After that a managed transfer to another school was arranged but it failed 'due to John's behaviour' or so it was reported. A second managed transfer was attempted to a different high school but this failed also. Then, one day, in a fit of anger,

John threw a brick through the windscreen of a teacher's car, which was parked in the school car park. At this stage, what should you, the psychologist, do? With no new information or hypotheses or interventions to offer you would be fairly limited in what you could do. Efforts to speak with John, his parent, even his uncle, led nowhere. For various reasons – time, cost, loss of confidence, your perceived ineffectiveness - you reluctantly decide to do little and let events run their course. John is permanently excluded from school shortly after. I know that most psychologists would want to stay involved after this point. The course of events that I have described, I would suggest, is a reflection of what happens sometimes in schools” (words spoken by an educational psychologist during supervision in 2012).

Sometimes the permanent exclusion of a child from school is the result of a series of events such as the ones described above, which is similar to the sequence described in list 1 (this thesis, ch3iv). From the perspective of members of school staff who have to ‘pick up the pieces’ permanent exclusion is the only practical they can do. Of course John’s story neither begins nor ends there but it raises the question: “Should educational psychologists routinely be involved in matters of school exclusion?’ If a child at risk of exclusion has a Statement of special educational needs (now an Education, Health and Care Plan) no doubt the educational psychologists *should* become involved. But, in other cases, how would the psychologist construct a test that would permit her to learn whether or not her involvement is being or has been beneficial to anyone at all? Is there such a test? I put this question because I once thought I had invented one. The premium of space requires me to give only minimal details. The tool I devised, *the Ford Wheel of Behavioural Concordance*, is described on the website,

[www.thefordwheel.co.uk](http://www.thefordwheel.co.uk). That pilot study demonstrated to me that the path towards school exclusion is sometimes avoidable. It also indicated that some exclusions are predictable. I remain concerned that we still do not, as a nation, know how many permanent exclusions from school are avoidable.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of defining what is meant by permanent school exclusion - the words used seem to change according to political will, something which Jones (2003) describes in detail - and given the well-researched associated problems of financial cost, justice, equality and harm, I struggle to find a positive outcome of the event itself - except for the excluding school. The story of John gives a flavour of the impending logic, the latent social need and the ratchet-like decision-making process from school and local authority perspectives. But what about the child excluded? How do we justify ignoring the risk of a false positive, i.e. excluding a child who should not have been excluded? Sourcing the child's perspective of exclusion is not the focus of this thesis. Neither is pursuit of the 'Holy Grail', a comprehensive and systemic evaluation of the school exclusion problem, which Theriot *et al*, (2009) attempted. As I have explained, such research does not seem to change the outcomes at the national level.

From here on in I apply new perspectives to this age-old, human problem, i.e. the school form of social exclusion. The story of John is meant to demonstrate that the phenomenon of permanent school exclusion is neither simple nor straightforward. I am focussing particularly on the avoidable exclusions and the difficult-to-understand human events that occur around the event. I now take my first bold steps into places old and new. I begin with Darwin's works. Darwin's approach was to use the methods of an anthropologist, therefore familiar and traditional methods. From this perspective I find logical arguments that explain who survives

and who does not in a given school environment. Darwin's works are familiar to me due to my background in science. If the quote that begins this chapter is to be believed, he offers us hope.

**(ii) Darwin in the Age of Enlightenment and a brief critique of his work**

Darwin, the geographer and researcher of biological diversity, was born after the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment. He travelled as the scientific officer on board *the Beagle* on its circumnavigation of South America and the globe, setting sail in 1831 and returning five years later. He studied the geography, flora and fauna of many places on Earth, most famously the Galapagos Islands. On his return to England he gathered together his own research notes and research from around the world and wrote *The voyage of H.M.S. Beagle* ([1845] 1892), *The origin of species* ([1859] 1985), *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* ([1872] 1999) and *The descent of man* ([1874] 2009). His contribution to our understanding of life on Earth is an epistemological jewel encrusted in the crown of natural science.

Scientific theories of species change in the nineteenth century are traditionally associated with the names of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), Darwin's father, Charles Darwin (1812–1882); and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913). These theories are concerned with the nature of organic life, the classification of forms, the relation of time to world order, and the relation of the natural world to theories of origin. The scientific foundations for Darwin's work were set in place years before he published his great works. And Darwin did not stand alone. He stood on the shoulders of giants who were either his contemporaries or who had come before him. What he did succeed in doing was to place his well-researched work - which, admittedly, is of the familiar and traditional type - squarely into the scientific community of the day and into English society as it stood at that time, into a world ready to consider a distinction between science and

religion (Jaynes, 1976, p.437). And he published - his works formvital cornerstones of the programme of studies in most degrees courses within the discipline of natural science.

Darwin's theories are open to critique. He wished for his works to be accepted in the naturalist branch of realism and he avoided metaphysical considerations wherever possible. Some of those considerations are discussed below. He adopted an intentionally narrow focus to his arguments and, in *The origin of species*, he generally avoided talk about God; and he barely alluded to the evolutionary origins of humans. A decade later, in *The descent of man*, he broached these subjects sensitively leaving us in no doubt that, in his view, human beings evolve as all other animals evolve. And the societies of humankind evolve also and they continue to do so. Darwin identified the locus of evolutionary change as residing *in* the individual organism. Evolutionary change is represented by the adapted behaviour and 'improved' morphology of the individual organism in the context of a changing environment. Other writers hold different views on this matter. Dawkins (1976) proposed that the locus of evolutionary change resides in individual genes themselves but, in Darwin's time, the gene was an incipient concept. Jaynes (1976) states unequivocally that the unit of evolutionary change lies in the group (p.127). But the precise locus of evolutionary change is not a central concern of this thesis.

Darwin made choices about what to include and what to exclude from his arguments. His success was in describing a mechanism that explained species change over time, locating such changes in solid, animate objects, i.e. in individual life forms and their propensity to change and adapt to a changing environment. Beneficial changes, by definition, increase the survivability of



the individual life form (i.e. plant, animal, bacteria or virus), increase its propensity to mate and procreate; and thereby increase its species survivability.

Darwin stepped carefully around a number of knotty issues, such as belief in God and the immortality of the soul, social injustice and the matter of free will. Today, 159 years after publication, Darwin's theories of evolution are not universally accepted by all. In many countries and for many religions Darwin's work is either ignored or parsimoniously interpreted. Evolution is not routinely taught in faith schools. Two examples, from many, highlight this. For example we read on the wikipedia website,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_views\\_on\\_evolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_views_on_evolution), that: "In 2014, when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant captured the Iraqi city of Mosul, the group issued a new set of rules for the schools there, which included a ban on the teaching of evolution". Evolution is not routinely accepted by all Christian religions either. On

<http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/theological-articles/can-a-christian-believe-in-evolution.cfm> Alexander reminds us that: "... as long as 'evolution' refers not to some secular philosophy, but to the biological theory describing how God has created all living things .." it can be accepted. Today, worldwide and in many religious faiths, the matter remains unresolved.

The part that consciousness plays in evolution is one of a number of issues sidestepped by Darwin. Writing two generations later in 1925, Schlick considered the philosophy of organic life and discussed the problems of attempting to apply consciousness to empirical study.

Consciousness, Schlick notes, is unobservable and therefore cannot be used as a criterion of

organic life (Mulder and van de Velde-Schlick, 1979a). Damasio (1999) provides a far richer exploration of consciousness.

Darwin offers little on other subjects that fascinate today's public, such as the neurotic behaviour of humankind, our fascinations with elites, politics, economics and wealth generation. I might add our penchant for social exclusion, social punishment and institutionalised aggression, including war. Darwin's work barely touches on the other subjects of human excess – greed, prejudice and the search for artistic perfection. Revealing his privileged position in a class-divided society, Darwin mentions that evolution possibly explains the increasing beauty of the aristocracy (Darwin, 1974, p.586). Seemingly, to Darwin, if there is an agency beyond evolution that drives human beings' endless adaptation to unceasing environmental change it is an uncaring one. The Earth, Nature or God care not which species successfully adapts, successfully breeds and consequently flourishes. Nature would not care if Earth were dominated by city-sized structures of coral rising from the seas instead of human societies living in glistening cities on the shores of the great oceans.

The present state of human existence and the problems that human societies face - increasing population growth, the extinction of complex animal forms, pollution of the seas and global warming – would, for Darwin, be predictable consequences of evolutionary and environmental vectors. In terms of survival, humankind is no better or no worse than any other animal form. Our place on Earth is not guaranteed. Our dominance over the environment is a social construction. Our self-proclaimed title, *homo sapiens* – more accurately, *homo sapiens sapiens* (Mithen, 1996) - is grandiose. The word *sapient* means wise or intelligent according to the

Compact Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes and Hawker, 2008). Presumably the double use of *sapiens* refers to our *exceptionally* great wisdom and intelligence.

**(iii) does the theory of evolution apply to modern humans?**

In a review of the many issues broached in *The origin of species*, Freeman (1974) cites *survival of the fittest* and *kill or be killed* as two familiar tenets arising from the Darwinian phrase, *struggle for existence*. Both are instrumental in determining future species success or extinction. *Struggle for existence* is the title of the third chapter of Darwin's masterpiece and Freeman's phrases remain familiar clichés. The phrase, *survival of the fittest*, is originally attributable to Herbert Spencer (Freeman, 1974) but is 'Darwinian' in its expectation.

Repeatedly Darwin ([1859] 1985) describes the need for the individual to compete with conspecifics and adapt to its environment or face death without successful procreation. In cases where many members of a species fail to adapt to a changing environment or significant threat, the species in its entirety risks extinction. Indeed, the fossil record stands as an incomplete record to all the larger species that have failed to adapt and that have become extinct. Darwin ([1874] 2009) describes how sexual selection provides a more sophisticated mechanism to steer the evolutionary direction of complex species, such as mammals and including humankind.

Sexual selection might be reworded as: *be successful* (alternatively, be '*attractive*') or *become extinct*. By 'successful' I mean that by being attractive, colourful, vital, clever and strong, either to the opposite sex or the agency that selects for survival, the complex creature should experience increased opportunities to breed, flourish and its descendants avoid extinction.

Taking these three tenets - *kill or be killed*, *survival of the fittest* and *be successful (or attractive) or become extinct* – I now consider them in relation to humans and in particular educational

policy. Below I cite writers in the field of education whose works could be interpreted according to these 'Darwinian' tenets. Words from a report by the Department for Education (2016) provide an example of the tenet, *survival of the fittest*:

"Section 68 of the 2006 Act enables the Secretary of State to direct a local authority to discontinue a maintained school .. This will usually be done where there is no prospect of the maintained school making sufficient improvements" (p.37).

Here the Secretary of State stands as the force of evolution, selecting the *fittest* organism, i.e. the school, to face the test of making 'sufficient improvements' or becoming extinct.

With the advent of Academies, one suspects the social engineering of a new breed of schools, perhaps even the emergence of a new species of learner? This might be read as an expression of the tenet, *be successful (or attractive) or become extinct*, as Gorad (2009) noted:

"We expect that all Academies will make steady upward progress .. Good teaching, excellent facilities and motivated pupils will deliver real improvements in educational standards" (DfES 2004b cited in Gorad, *ibid*).

Reading between the lines, one wonders whether non-Academies are viewed by some as a species of school doomed to extinction, the critical feature being their failure to 'deliver real improvements in educational standards'.

The third example might be considered to be an expression of the tenet, *kill or be killed*. Levacic and Hardman (1998) note:

“... if schools cannot adjust to the requirements of their customers, then the operation of market forces will ensure that the schools which serve their customers least well will lose pupils and cease to exist ...

And:

.. in the ecological approach (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), organisations (schools) that do not adapt are not selected for survival and growth .. (and will experience) .. decline and death according to their degree of matching with environmental requirements” (p 304.

The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

From natural science grew social science, gaining provenance in the field of education. Since the advent of compulsory schooling for all four generations ago, numerous theories have emerged that continue to shape our understanding of human behaviour and of problem behaviour attributed to children in school settings. I have selected three writers to represent the perspectives of: (i) those who, in considering the ‘problem behaviour’ of the child, decide to focus on the child himself or (ii) those who focus on the influence of the child’s immediate social group and (iii) those who focus on society-wide interpretations of problem behaviour.

### ***within-child interpretations***

Skinner was a behaviourist, a tradition founded by Watson (1913). Skinner extended the Pavlovian paradigm of conditioned reflexes (Pavlov, 1906) and he described operant conditioning as a more-sophisticated way of learning applicable to more advanced life forms (Skinner, 1953), such as fish, rats and human beings. Skinner's early work was with animals but the application of his theories to human beings was made in other writings (Skinner, 1957).

Man and woman, like other complex mammals, are sensitive to the forces of operant

conditioning and such ways of 'learning' hold value for the individual. Heightened sensitivity to the influence of operant conditioning has arguably evolved in humans over the ages.

Educational journals abound with studies that implicate operant conditioning as an intervention strategy for problem behaviour in schools, the approach of Assertive Discipline (Canter, 2009) offering one example.

### ***within-group interpretations***

Two generations later, Dreikurs *et al* (1998) listed four main reasons why children (or adults) might misbehave in a specific social context. This posts a move away from within-child perspective, a move towards the influence of the group. The four reasons the authors give are: (i) they (the children) do not know the rules; (ii) they have unmet basic needs; (iii) they have a diagnosable condition; and/or (iv) for complex reasons, such as revenge. Embedded in this perspective are group interpretations of the behaviour being looked at. Dreikurs' typology can help the busy teacher think a bit deeper about the child showing problems in the classroom.

The sorting exercise also reminds us that children exhibit problem behaviours *in situ* for reasons that can be understood by reference to the wider social context.

### ***wider societal interpretations***

Miller (2004) focussed on how children's behaviour could be interpreted by the wider social group, i.e. by society itself. He allocated prominent studies of problem behaviour in children into sets, including the psychiatric, sociological, organizational and behavioural perspectives. According to the dictates of fashion the issue of troublesome pupil behaviour is viewed in

different ways at different times depending upon the perspective currently favoured.

Considering the articles cited earlier in chapter three the contemporary fashion seems to favour the organizational perspective. Just as the paradigms of social science have evolved, so have our complex human responses to so-called troublesome behaviour in children. But does human behaviour inevitably evolve to the “more complex” inspired by the “more intelligent” as Keith (1927, citing Lewin, 2009, p.5) suggests? Or is human behaviour becoming more neurotic as Bion (1961, p.14) suggests? Is there yet another evolutionary stage for humankind - a direction that deepens human excess? This matter is discussed later.

#### **(iv) Darwin on society, morality and God**

In this chapter I am attempting to apply some of Darwin’s thought about evolution to an understanding of human behaviour. In *The descent of man* ([1874] 2009) Darwin found it necessary to discuss society, morality and God. I discuss each area briefly below because, I think, they lead to an important point in human history, i.e. the present. I am suggesting that Darwin found matters of human purpose, human limitation and the destiny of humankind difficult to discuss. So do we.

#### ***society***

Darwin alights in favour of evolutionary advantage to the individual human (or other type of social beast) in being part of a larger, complex group or society. In the case of human beings, the weak, the infirm, the aged and the ugly might readily perish in a primitive environment ruled by an unforgiving Nature. But Darwin espouses the higher virtues of modern humans living in societies:

“... (man in society checks) the process of (natural) elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment” (pp.133 & 134. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

But Darwin exposes a degree of conflict about the same subject on the same page:

“No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this (expression of sympathy, support of the weak, etc.) must be highly injurious to the race of man” (p.134. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

### ***morality***

Darwin allocates a whole chapter of *The descent of man* (Darwin, [1874] 2009) to moral sense, noting that “... no one has approached (the subject) exclusively from the side of natural history” (p.97. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability). It is, of course, debatable whether approaching such a subject exclusively from any single discipline is truly informative. I quote Darwin on suffering, moral improvement; and the human being’s tolerance of different human types:

“We are impelled to relieve the suffering of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved” (p.106).

And:

“The more enduring social instincts conquer the less persistent instincts” (p.110).

And:

“The virtues which must be practised .. are those which are still recognized as the most important. But they must be practised almost exclusively in relation to the men of the



same tribe; and (the opposites of these virtues) are not regarded as crimes in relation to men of other tribes”(pp.116-11. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

Darwin visualizes a more settled future for humankind than subsequent social history has revealed. Consider, for example, the exploitation of primitive tribes through colonisation in the past 200 years, the reality of two world wars, the continuation of slavery in its modern forms; and the harsh legal penalties that continue to be meted out on simple, vulnerable people who lack economic means or educational opportunity in modern, western countries. Measure these against the platitude expressed by Darwin:

“As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him” (p.122).

Presumably we are lacking in 'the simplest reason'? I detect a degree of hyperbole seeping into Darwin's works. Close reading of his works tells me that he envisaged an evolution of mankind's form, function and social behaviour, as generations go by, that is positive in nature. This will involve the positive development of his higher, aesthetic, social and moral qualities. There is little negativity here. Darwin lived in what Kingsmill (1944) called the Romantic age (p.10). He had departed this world long before the Age of Disenchantment (in, for example, the depressing warnings of Fort (1919), Schopenhauer (1850) and Wells (1945)). This tendency becomes more apparent when Darwin discusses God.

**God**

Regarding the issue of the existence of God, Darwin ([1874] 2009) notes:

“The belief in God has often been advanced as not only the greatest, but the most complete of all the distinctions between man and the lower animals .. and apparently follows from a considerable advance in man's reason, and .. his faculties of imagination, curiosity and wonder” (p.612).

And:

“(The higher question), whether there exists a Creator and Ruler of the universe; and this has been answered in the affirmative by some of the highest intellects that have ever existed” (p.94. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

Never, since the Age of Enlightenment, has so great an intellectual force sat so squarely on a fence, purveying before him the field of human improvement. In summary, Darwin's views on society, morality and God are generally informed by evolutionary theory. Or he glosses over or side-steps knotty issues that are raised. Wherever there is doubt, Darwin chooses his words carefully and maintains the *status quo* of the day. One must take care to fit in with one's societal group otherwise one risks becoming an unpublished or little-read 'outsider'. As will be seen later in thesis, such forms of punishment were visited upon Jaynes (see chapter seven) and, to some extent, Bion (see chapter six). My essential point from this consideration of Darwin's advice about our human evolution, social evolution and “.. his faculties of imagination, curiosity and wonder.. ” is that the progress of humankind does not always occur in a positive direction, as the next section makes clear.

#### **(v) anthropomorphic hyperbole**

I would argue that anthropomorphic tendencies prevail in human society and can be witnessed in our religions, our creative expressions and in our social behaviour. An example of illogic in the latter is our 'will to punish' (Parsons, 2005), a subject given thorough coverage by Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982). Since Darwin would argue that everything seems to have evolved in humans, I presume that our anthropomorphic tendencies have evolved also? But what do I mean by 'anthropomorphic hyperbole?' The Compact Oxford English Dictionary defines the word, 'anthropomorphism' as: "treating God, an animal or an object as if it were human" (Soanes and Hawker, 2008). I would suggest an evolved extension to this definition, a hyperbole incorporating theism, which I would define as follows:

#### ***a definition of anthropomorphic hyperbole***

*Anthropomorphic hyperbole is a condition that prevails upon human beings, the consequence of which is that most people consider all things human to be the product of a divine hand. As such, the evolutionary and social forces that have resulted in the present state of humankind were always pre-eminent in God's plans. Thus all of the products and projects of humankind are ultimately divine in purpose. In a befuddled way humankind sees itself as a product of, and a relation to, its own God. According to this condition, man and woman are incipient Gods themselves and their destiny lies in a heaven located somewhere in, or possibly beyond, the universe as we know it.*

The above definition is the author's quote but I recognise something similar from Toynbee (1946). I also see parallels with the condition I describe above and perfectionism, as described by Curran and Hill (2012). The condition I describe is a consequence of human evolution.

I need to bring life to my definition. I was brought up part of a large, Catholic family. Human beings, I was told at home but more so at school, were made in the image of God. In school in the 1960s I was taught that we evolved from a common ape-like ancestor, as Darwin suggested. But my father objected to me bringing home a copy of *The naked ape* (Morris, 1967). Somehow in this story of the evolution of modern day humans, God interseeded. The reader might glimpse the not-unfamiliar conflicts of a young, curious Catholic. One strongly suspects that the silent assumption of today's religious deist is that the species, *homo sapiens sapiens*, was divinely and evolutionarily (possibly fine-tuned by chance) designed to become the dominant species inhabiting, indeed ruling, the Earth. Man and woman, possessing the "faculties of imagination, curiosity and wonder" (Darwin, [1874] 2009, p.612), have shaped the world according to their will; and tacitly according to the will of God. A Utopian view of human civilization is adequately described by Kingsmill (*ibid*): the modern, scientific-Utopian view is described in the next paragraph.

The exact date of our ascension to 'world dominance' may never be known. Mithin (1996) places the emergence of *homo sapiens sapiens* somewhere between 100,000 and 60,000 years ago (p.20). Having assumed a discrete and successful species identity the influence of God, Nature, evolution and chance over millennia resulted in the 'perfect' variety of human being that we see all around us (hence *perfectionism*). According to the persuasions of anthropomorphic hyperbole, what we envisage are even more sophisticated technologies,

telephones with personalities, in a world free of corruption, free of war and free of nuclear missiles. Our future is a communicating world with a stable world economy, where global warming is controlled - indeed harnessed. It is a world with a credible meteorite-deflection satellite system, the eradication of malaria, poverty and starvation, where homelessness does not exist. It is a world without social exclusion and a drastically reduced use of prisons. Our future lies in the exploration of space by crews of selfless astronauts and their families who will inhabit fusion-powered, interstellar spaceships and travel to distant galaxies so that humankind can populate the universe - as it is destined to do. It is difficult to challenge such deeply-held views. The plans to colonise other planets by NASA are underway, replete with the rejoinder, "Mars explorers wanted" (accessed on 21 March 2017 on <http://mars.jpl.nasa.gov/> but unavailable on 21 October 2017). It was even briefly possible to book trips around the moon. On 21 March 2017 I was able to access the site: [www.space.com/35844-elon-musk-SpaceX-announcement-today.html](http://www.space.com/35844-elon-musk-SpaceX-announcement-today.html), but this link was also unavailable on 21 October 2017. Perhaps the plans are on hold?

But what if we are deluding ourselves? What if the Great Evolutionary-Design-Nature- Chance- Experiment that gave rise to humankind, as described by Darwin, is spent? What if the particular genetic algorithm that evolved between 100,000 BC and the present day has reached its asymptote? What if we have failed, or are about to fail, as a species? What if we have caused global warming and cannot actually prevent the melting of the ice caps? What if we cannot stop the supremacy and madness of big business from dominating the world? What if 'Donald' is about to become a popular christian name once again? What if there will never be such a thing as viable space travel? What if this is just a generationally-extended end game of the human

species as Wells (1945) has described? What if we are living in a time when humankind is in the throes of unstoppable evolutionary reversion?

I apologise for my depressing tone. My intention has been to describe what I mean by anthropomorphic hyperbole. My purpose in doing so is to argue that it influences our thoughts on God, science, society and school - on many aspects of our supposedly-chosen behaviour. Anthropomorphic hyperbole befuddles our thinking about ourselves, our purposes and the control we have over our own behaviour. Like a shadow it stalks us. It is present in the many, acute and pernicious acts of social exclusion witnessed in the world today, not just in schools. We remain blind to the illogical acts of social exclusion because we conceal the unpleasant details even from ourselves - especially from ourselves. We remain deaf to the words of those who suffer because we refuse to listen. We remain ignorant of the causes of human suffering because we are obsessed by the dreams inspired by anthropomorphic hyperbole and by the promise of a positivist science. We show little potential to change and great potential to accelerate in our journey towards the unknown. I am not alone in my doubts. In *World without mind* Foer (2017) offers a similar doom-laden critique of modern forms of social communication.

Our human tendencies toward anthropomorphic hyperbole explain the disjunction between how we would like things to be versus the burgeoning reality of how things really are. We are unable, as a society, as a school, as an employee of a local authority, to really hold ourselves to account for what we do and what we allow others to do. Not just I, but other researchers, report on isolated pockets of acute suffering in areas of modern society; and the predictable recurrence of the events of permanent school exclusion offers just one example. As a societal,

institutional or working group, we seem unable to change the problematic situations that we have brought into existence. The list of studies in chapter three stand as testimony to the obvious disjoint that exists between a system we would like to see in place for dealing with children's problem behaviour in schools and the reality of the outcome for our most vulnerable children. This is a difficult subject to write about, the difficulty being a symptom of the underlying problem. Causal links between an evolved human species, an evolved society of humankind replete with evolved punitive systems therein, features of which echo in an evolved education system, are impossible to scientifically prove. This is, therefore, a difficult argument to win.

**(vi) does Darwin's theory of evolution inform the study of school exclusion?**

Darwin was a naturalist and I would argue that the tools of the natural scientist have simply evolved to become the tools of the social scientist. The most commonly-used tools when pursuing inquiries into problem behaviour in children in school and school exclusion are based on familiar and traditional epistemologies and the methodologies they inspire. I suspect that most professionals in the field rely on hypotheses, insights and approaches of the type offered by Skinner (*ibid*), Dreikurs (*ibid*) and Miller (*ibid*). The accepted tools of the social scientist encourage the educational psychologist to consider *a type* of pupil behaviour and *a type* of school response to that behaviour. We are, after all, applied psychologists. Often the problem behaviour of the child is evidenced by a behaviour log. Sometimes the school response is a 'we tried this but without success' list. But the tools that the social scientist use are not invaluable - I would simply argue that they are limited. They do not deal fully with the messiness of human behaviour. They tell us which people 'lose out' and which people 'benefit' but they do not tell

us how to redress the balance. They tell us how we arrived at this problematic situation but they offer little hope of telling us how to improve the situation. I offer one example based on my own work as an educational psychologist.

In earlier chapters I reported on the consultancy role I briefly held with the Alternative Provision (AP) system in one local authority in England. I have reported that a sizeable minority of the 14, 15 and 16 year-old students who were persuaded to leave mainstream high schools to join the AP system of colleges were sacrificed in support of an ideal that suited high schools' agendas. This trade-off is given words in the quote at the beginning of chapter two. It speaks of a delicate balance that exists in our education system - a balance between an objectionable practice that impacts negatively on the few to the benefit of the many. I accept that for most teenagers who are propelled on to this educational trajectory the assurances of the AP manager were correct - "... most of the students are very happy..." (this thesis, ch4iii). But what about the sizeable minority who were not 'very happy'? As reported earlier chapters, of the 200 or so students in the AP system in one target year, my estimate was that up to 40 of them were very unhappy with their lot. I would argue that the 'Darwinian' tenets, *survival of the fittest* and *be successful (or attractive) or become extinct*, applied to this disaffected minority. Below, I provide more evidence about the problems faced by students in the AP colleges.

In those days I had insider knowledge about the successes - and there were quite a few - and the shortcomings of the AP system in that local authority. I worked within an imperfect system, sometimes as an observer of moral propriety versus institutional expediency. I personally met the sizeable minority of AP students who were unhappy with their lot. But they (and I) had no power to change things. The clock could not be turned back - they could not return to



mainstream education - and their voices remained unheard. I suffered a degree of internal conflict and from this grew resistance. I could understand the need for specialist AP colleges from schools' perspective but I could not square this with the shortcomings of the system. I sent a discussion paper to my line managers, the aim being to highlight the shortcomings of the AP system. These systems are a familiar type of resource used more widely in England (Kendall *et al*, 2003). My paper was ignored but the concerns I had can now see the light of day. One obvious weakness is that my concerns do not necessarily apply to other local authorities or even the unnamed one, since time has passed. But it can be used as a gauge of service delivery.

***list 2: problems with the allocation of students to the KS4 AP system***

- (i) Files, which might contain antecedent information about the student and his (most students being 'he') previous behaviour in high school, were very thin. One I saw comprised a single piece of paper, which was basically the referral form signed by parent;
- (ii) The type of data collected by high schools about the antecedent behaviour of referred students was not standard between schools; and behaviour logs were not systematically reviewed or verified by outside agencies but were taken at face value;
- (iii) The student discussed at the panel was not always consulted about his proposed move from mainstream high school to the AP system prior to the panel discussion;
- (iv) A number of parents told to me that they had been given no real choice in accepting the placement offered by the panel. Their choice was to accept or face the prospect of their child's

permanent exclusion from high school - with little information given about what would happen thereafter;

(v) Rarely was the decision to place a student in the KS4 system *not* the outcome of the panel discussion. No published figures exist to shed further light on this matter. I only attended two such panel meetings. I found them so stressful that I agreed with my line manager to withdraw. My evidence base is therefore thin but I am at a loss to know how to extend it;

(vi) Long-term educational, health and lifestyle outcomes for the students who joined the AP system versus those who did not were collate once in the years I was involved. The report was not widely available, certainly not available to the public - or to me, the consultant.

The situation described above may have changed now in that particular local authority. Recent research by others indicates more improvements. I have reservations, however, about the papers written by Kendall *et al* (2003) and Kendall *et al* (2007), who reviewed Alternative Education Initiatives nationally. Both of these reviews were funded by the Home Office and both adopted a 'broad-brush-stroke' approach designed to identify the 'positives' in the system and indicate only in a general sense the shortfalls in the system. My personal experience of the AP system was that the vast majority of students who joined the system were happy to leave their high school career behind and begin anew in a college which offered a more practical-based curriculum. This acknowledgement does not confirm the necessity for *having* an AP system – it merely notes that, if such routes out of mainstream school are created, they will be filled and that 'most students' will feel 'happy' in their new placement. The fact that twenty percent feel 'unhappy' is a compromise acceptable to someone, somewhere. The works of

Kendall (2003, 2007) do not highlight the plight of the disaffected minority. In Kendall's reviews, based on an epistemology consistent with the organisational psychology approach described by Miller (2004), the voices of the 'rejected beans' were silent.

My work with the AP system came to an end around the time I submitted my discussion paper with little explanation given for why. But I knew why - my resistance had challenged the *status quo*. The story reflects the tenet, *the struggle for existence*, because, whereas I became extinct in that particular local authority habitat, the AP system continues. According to careful research I carried out in that local authority I found the return rate to mainstream school from the AP system to mainstream was less than one in a hundred at best. This is similar to when a dinosaur becomes extinct - it does not pop up again later on a another island - except in the film, *Jurassic Park*. *The struggle for existence* applies to the student who is excluded from school. And sometimes it applies to the educational psychologist also.

I express again my growing doubts about the accuracy of politically sensitive data relating to school exclusion. The familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies are convenient tools for use in such research. But they change nothing. I would argue that the situation of how the AP system operates is as confused as Garland (2001) describes it:

"Socially situated, imperfectly knowledgeable actors stumble upon ways of doing things that seem to work, and seem to fit with their other concerns. Authorities patch together workable solutions to problems that they can see and can get to grips with. Agencies struggle to cope with their workload, and do the best job that they can in the circumstances" (p.26).

There are no plans that I am aware of to investigate, using any progressive methodology (such as described earlier by Clarke, 2004), the situation for children permanently from schools nationally so as to promote real change. If, as reported in chapter three, 80 children per year were permanently or effectively excluded from school in one local authority that posted a 'zero' on the government website for the same year then presumably 80 children (or thereabouts) were permanently excluded the following year also. And the year after that. No accurate figures are collated. No individual stories are highlighted. All traces of the thousands of children excluded in the past twenty years from that one local authority have now disappeared - as, no doubt, they were intended to. Pirrie and Macleod (2009), reporting on their inability to successfully investigate destinations for pupils excluded from special schools and pupil referral units, note:

“The unintended consequences of this (these exclusions) was that the traces of individual young people rapidly faded from view, like lines drawn in the sand”  
(p.193. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability).

The problem for children who are excluded from school, their anonymity, their experiences, their untold stories and the injustice of the exclusion acts have been explored by my contemporaries at the University of Sheffield in recent doctoral theses. Pomerantz (2008), Callwood (2013) and Oakley (2015). These authors have explored the identities, possible selves and stories of excluded children and young people. I am not alone in expressing my concerns about the general situation facing children at risk of school exclusion.

Darwin's insights provide us with crude, almost ruthless, tools to understand why some children face permanent exclusion from school. His work on evolution helps us to see that human

society is an evolved, biological and social phenomenon; and that within this the modern education system is a complex offshoot. It is also an elaborate social construction. School exclusion is also an evolved social phenomenon. Darwin's work precedes the emergence of modern forms of social scientific inquiry. But the familiar and traditional forms of inquiry that have since evolved are found to be subservient to political will, casualties of government and local authority targets and susceptible to the influence of anthropomorphic hyperbole. Little good seems to come out of this new science. What, I wonder, are the other limitations of those forms of inquiry and the epistemologies that underpin them?

#### **(vii) the auguries of science**

I wish to raise more doubts about the pursuit of reason in the scientific study of school exclusion, especially research that relies on the familiar and traditional tools of social science as described in chapter three. The tools Darwin employed as a natural scientist have long been superseded. I should pause briefly to note, however, that as an educational psychologist, I seem to apply similar tools – I travel to new places, I carry accreditation, I speak to the locals, I observe 'misbehaving' children (although they never seem to misbehave as much when I am observing them), I make notes, I compare my views and findings with other data gathered by other professionals and from parents; and I write up and disseminate my advice; which could be seen as an hypothesis. Arguably, in each case I am involved with, especially where a pupil's permanent exclusion from school exists as a future possibility, I work as Darwin did and develop an *ad hoc* theory that explains 'where are we?', 'what are we looking at?', 'what caused this?' and 'what might we do about it?' No doubt other educational psychologists act similarly? But is this enough? Surely we must look deeper. We must take into account the influence of family,

school and the wider social system prevailing upon the child. We should be afraid to use more creative forms of inquiry. We must factor in the emotional noise of our confusion. The educational psychologist is but a small cog in a big machine. And at times I have found that sometimes people are just not ready for change. I can provide an apt example.

I developed a support project called *The transition project* in 2002 targeting vulnerable Year 6 children at the point of their transition to high school. My primary aim was to help children at risk of school exclusion but, pragmatically, I also targeted children considered to be vulnerable in any way at the point of transition. The project ran in one high school for thirteen consecutive years. I became a familiar face in that high school. In order to build a support group it was first necessary to identify which children might need help. The information I sourced at the time provided a surprisingly accurate way of identifying which children might experience emotional, social, behavioural or learning problems early in their Year 7 in high school. For each referred child I computed a numerical risk quotient. The projected 'vulnerability' of referred children proved to be a valid within-child feature amenable to data modelling based on statistical probability. Having identified which children might need help, I, a fellow educational psychologist and staff at the school arranged support measures, which included acrylic art painting and supportive group work involving pupil groups of about twelve individuals. I did not identify to anyone the risk quotient associated with any particular child - we simply offered the rather extensive support arrangements to those accepted to the project. It is important to note that participation in the project was very enjoyable for staff and pupils. No real problems of any nature occurred - except that occasionally a mini-bus failed to turn up. The project had a reputation of success.

This project began in 2002, long before I embarked upon doctoral training - I was still a disciple of positivism. I still favoured quantitative analysis of discrete, collected data. And so, because I was able and inclined to do so, I developed a complex mathematical algorithm based on the method of discriminant analysis. The algorithm could be used to compare the child's measured risk quotient at primary school to their reported risk as this became evident in the early months of Year 7. My purpose was to predict pupil need and set in motion appropriate support measures. I had stumbled across an algorithm that predicted in advance problems children might experience in the complex, messy world of high school life. I am unable to go into any depth here about the ethical concerns that this project raised. To deal with them I kept project people encounters with children simple, sensitive, positive and focussed on the experiences the child had in high school. It definitely had nothing to do with numbers, which were not shared with high school staff.

A slight imaginative leap suggested to me that similar types of information, suitably amended, would provide an equally valid way of identifying *which teachers* would experience problems with the target children in Year 7. Not only had I developed a mathematically sophisticated way of looking into within-child predictors of future social problems I had also developed a tool that could look at within-teacher predictors! I described this possible extension to the transition project to the headteacher that I knew well. She was most unimpressed. "That," she said, "would really upset the teaching unions". That particular lesson had its effect on me - it taught me that if I could not instigate research into teacher variables in a school where I was well known and had worked for many years, it was never going to happen. (The transition project

was delivered as a poster presentation at the 2010 British Psychological Society conference held in Bournemouth, *Interventions in educational psychology: building the evidence*).

Schools and most institutions of society resist any 'rocket science' that truly reveals the intricacies of a problematic social behaviour – be this troublesome pupil behaviour or any other social pathology. Within person variables are in fashion but by taking into account wider situational variables we could really find out what is going on in any particular school or local authority in regards of any child problem behaviour. - if only we would use the appropriate methodological and statistical tools that exist to permit such empirical inquiry. But it seems such inquiries rarely, if ever, mounted, even though the tools exist. There must be reasons for this resistance? Perhaps the difficulty lies with the epistemology itself? Or does it lie in the nature of institutions that desperately seek to maintain the *status quo* at all costs? To highlight this point, I have collected together a brief list of empirical research in the field of education where each study arrives at conclusions that pose a challenge to either epistemology itself or to the maintenance of the *status quo*.

Pirrie and Macleod (2009), researching destinations and outcomes for pupils excluded from special schools and PRUs, note “(There is) a growing body of scholarly activity that has raised important questions about the epistemological bases of educational research” (p.185. My insertion of two words to improve readability.)

MacNab, Visser and Daniels (2007), researching 'hard to find' young people in their school years, note in their abstract:



“(The second challenge of this study was that) .. the research faced an almost insurmountable challenge in finding and obtaining data on a sample for which the outcomes of the research may pose a threat to those holding the data” (p.142. My insertion of words used in other parts of the study to improve readability.)

Visser, Daniels and Macnab (2005), researching children with behavioural difficulties who are 'missing', note:

“.. data held by education authorities are not always very accurate for a variety of reasons .. data sets are corrupted in relation to permanent exclusions .. This group of pupils figure prominently amongst the 'missing' ” (p.46).

The plight we find ourselves in complex: firstly, the familiar and traditional tools of social scientist that are used to reveal underlying problems of avoidable social exclusion in the institutions of British society seem ineffective in promoting any beneficial change in outcomes for vulnerable people affected. Secondly, where better tools do exist schools, local authorities and government agencies seem to resist their use! This is a point worth repeating. In chapter three I reported that the number of children permanently excluded from schools in England in recent years is less than 1 in 1000 according to the government database. My own estimate is more like 1 in 50. Admittedly, the latter ratio is based on my ‘on the job’ experience in one local authority and can only be considered to be indicative. Both incidence rates compare favourably with the 85,188 people who comprise the prison population of Britain in 2016 (sourced at <http://howardleague.org/> on 15 August 2016), this figure being approximately 1 in 700 of the adult population. All three ratios (1/50, 1/700 and 1/1000) are of the same order of magnitude. Unlike the excluded pupil population the size of the prison population is an undeniably

objective statistic, representing a huge data set held on a literally captive audience. The captive audience gives rise to an exciting, methodological opportunity, as I will now describe as it highlights the 'resistance' I write of.

It is possible to collect together multi-various person-related information about serving prisoners in British prisons who register their agreement to an anonymised study that I here describe. It is possible to gather the same data from a similar number of volunteer made up of controls, i.e. people who did not go to jail but who did end up in court for similar antecedent reasons to the experimental group. The controls would be matched by age, gender, occupation, information about the crime and which court they attended, the name of the judge, etc. The more information the better - the statistical tool of discriminant analysis (DA) can digest all these factors, including spurious data. It offers the appropriate number-crunching and epistemological blending machine. I used the statistical tool in the transition project and also in an earlier dissertation study (Forde, 1987). Such a DA would yield a discrete number of signpost indicators that could be used to predict group membership, i.e. the group ending up in jail versus the group not going to jail.

But the outcomes of the analysis would not only reveal the within-person variables in relation to the criminals themselves - the antecedent behaviour patterns, the lifestyle choices and inherent criminality of their friends and family, etc - they would also reflect accurately on the courts and the magistrates that handed down the sentences! The study would reveal the regions of the country where imprisonment for whatever crime was more likely than a suspended sentence or not guilty verdict regardless of the crime committed. It would reveal the identity of the so-called 'imprisoning' judges. It would reveal the strong link between future

imprisonment and past economic poverty. It would reveal many systemic variables that lie beyond within-person variables. The results of such a study would provide information *not only* on those people who ended up in jail – it would provide vital insight into the institutions and boroughs in society that seem to have an obsession with punishment.

To my knowledge, no such study has been carried out either for the prison population or the excluded pupil population. There must be reasons for this. If we do not find out who, why, where and when people end up in prison, we must consider the reason that we, as a society, do not want to find out? The methods of inquiry are there but the motive is not. Does the problem lie in the epistemology itself? Or does it lie in the nature of human beings? The modern tools of social inquiry are subservient to purpose and are not ‘free to use’ at the point where they are needed.

A picture is emerging, a picture of a silent, concealed body of pupils who, year on year, are excluded from our schools. Their identities change but the pattern of their exclusion does not. Once excluded, and having left school and grown up, their stories are forgotten - but not by them. About these people there are no plans - at least not in England - to find out who they are (or were or will be)? Why were they excluded? What were the signpost indicators of the risks of exclusion that they faced? What were the subsequent paths of their future lives? And which exclusions could have been avoided?

It is likely that such unknowns could be uncovered and the embedded injustices exposed and hopefully rectified. But I seriously doubt that it is the aim of any local authority or government to do this. My personal view, distilled from ‘working in the field’ of school exclusion, is that

there is no political 'stomach' to explore the situation for children involved. The research studies and narrative evidence that I have presented in this thesis indicates that it is the aim of local authorities and government is to *avoid* looking at these things and to continue to maintain the *status quo* at all costs. The social system in England has its own way of deciding the sort of research that will be mounted and what sort of research finding will be reported. Nothing will change until we change something in ourselves.

#### **(viii) summary of this chapter**

Applying Darwinian perspectives of sexual selection to the phenomenon of school exclusion reveals the primitive nature of our behaviour. Consider two extremes of pupil type: at one end of the spectrum we have a model pupil who is healthy, personally attractive and with good academic skills. His family are economically secure and he himself communicates well. This successful pupil type can control and manage his own personal needs in the general environment of mainstream school. His future trajectory is the education system lies parallel with the direction enshrined in the school improvement plan. This pupil is destined to get a high number of A to Cs grades in GCSEs. In short, *he is one of us*, one of our preferred type, the dominant subspecies in the local habitat that evolution will favour. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the 'troublesome' pupil type, an irregular variant in the local tribe. This pupil is physically unattractive and academically weak. His family are poor, it can be difficult to understand what he says and he has a trail of negative behaviour sleuths recorded in this and from his previous school. His emotional and social needs burst forth in the most inconvenient places and he is destined to get very few A to Cs grades at GCSEs. In short, *he is not one of us*,

he is non-preferred type, his type is representative of a redundant subspecies which is destined for early extinction.

Most people would argue the matter is more complex than I have described it but perhaps it does not need to be? I think it is helpful for educational psychologists to occasionally adopt a pragmatic and reductionist perspective about what is occurring the workplace, perhaps not always at the conscious level. From such a perspective other influences reveal themselves, as the next three chapters demonstrate. In using the work of Darwin I have taken hesitant steps down an alternative path. I am now able to apply other, basic, primitive inspirations in my story of school exclusion. I explore beliefs, group dynamics and anthropological motivations at work in the social phenomenon of school exclusion. Perhaps what we are witnessing in modern day schools in respect of school exclusion *is* something primitive, illogical and needlessly punitive? Educational psychology, as a profession, seems bound to epistemologies and methodologies that can explain in intricate detail *how we got to this problematic situation* but it cannot find any way out of it! In the chapters that follow I go even further and explore little-known mores, motivations, beliefs and vectors at play in this insoluble crisis of social exclusion.

## chapter five: the work of Dawkins

"The priests of the different religious sects .. dread the advance of science as witches do the approach of daylight, and scowl on the fatal harbinger announcing the subdivision of the duperies on which they live" (Thomas Jefferson, quoted by Dawkins, 2007, p.137).

I infer from the above quote that Jefferson felt that science would sweep away falsehood. And yet I spent much of chapter three critiquing familiar and traditional methods of science. And in chapter four I embraced the work of Darwin. I must seem confused - and I was but reading Dawkins helped. In this chapter I employ some of the thinking tools that Dawkins (1976, 2007) used to explore what we believe about religion, children, education and school exclusion. How do we begin to inspect our beliefs? Where, I wonder, do our morals come from? Do the words we use when representing the lives of children represent pure, rational strings of thought? Here I consider the works of Dawkins, whilst retaining a focus on the child at risk of permanent exclusion from school.

I would describe Dawkins as a scientist, Darwinist and an atheist. I must immediately confess that citing the works of Dawkins - who, like Darwin (and Jaynes to follow), is male, white and a positivist - is risky. But I *needed* to read Dawkins. His provocative work, *The God delusion* (Dawkins, 2007), brought an end to a prolonged period of writer's block that overtook me. It came at a time when I was beginning to wonder why we, as social scientists, bother to study school exclusion at all? Why do we believe that our inquiries into this sometimes-pernicious, social practice will make any difference? Permanent school exclusion is a well-studied social phenomenon. Hundreds, if not thousands, of research studies reveal its illogic, bias, shame, deceit and its needless economic and human cost. My studies had stalled. What was the point

in continuing if I did not believe that the familiar and traditional forms of inquiry would do any good? I needed an inspiration and I borrowed a few of Dawkins' ideas. The chapter begins with a fictional story of a girl who, despite being permanently excluded from school, continued to exercise her right to choose her own future. Laura was not defined by her school exclusion status - she was defined by her ability to rise above it.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- (i) fictional story: Laura
- (ii) game theory: why most children choose to behave properly
- (iii) the origin of a child's moral code
- (iv) a critique of Dawkins' work
- (v) thought experiments deriving from Dawkins' work
- (vi) are we even asking the right questions?
- (vii) the danger of making an avoidable permanent exclusion from school
- (viii) summary of this chapter

**(i) fictional story: Laura**

Laura was a Year 7 girl at a local high school when she was referred to the educational psychology service due to her increasing behaviour log - she was quickly providing evidence of maladjustment and members of school staff were dutifully recording it. There is not enough space here to explore the issues of child representation that behaviour logs raise. Laura was defiant. She was fighting the staff, the school system and other children, usually quite openly. The educational psychologists' involvement including a meeting with Laura. It was apparent from Laura's conversational skills that she was a highly intelligent young girl. A particular

problem for the school was that she smoked cigarettes during the school day on school premises in view of the other children. She said she did this to relieve her stress but she would not discuss the source of her distress. Smoking was the most common 'sleuth' in her behaviour log. It was apparent that, beyond good academic potential, Laura had the personality, strength of will and keen interpersonal skills to disrupt the educational experience of many other children in school if she chose to do so. But the psychologist did not think that this was her intention. In conversation she found Laura to be open, honest and able to talk about things. Laura seemed a very ordinary young girl engaged in avoidable, disruptive behaviour for unknown reasons. The project of discovering 'why?' remained elusive. The psychologist's working hypothesis remained unproven throughout - that Laura's stress stemmed from family issues and her behaviour was a complex behavioural strategy, possibly a form of Freudian displacement (Freud, 1936).

The psychologist's advice to school was to stop fighting Laura – if she smoked cigarettes, school could ask her mother to collect her from school, i.e. give her a one-day exclusion. If she blatantly defied a rule or a teacher's reasonable request then the SENCo's support team should take her to a private room and discuss the matter with her, calmly and reasonably. Laura had a good relationship with the SEN support team, so this was a pragmatic suggestion. The psychologist advised members of staff to demonstrate to Laura that they were not her enemies as Laura seemed to think they were. If Freudian displacement was the explanation then such displacement required to be exposed, understood and challenged. If Laura was as able as the psychologist thought, she would presumably respond to this approach. Members of the senior management team, who Laura saw as 'the enemy,' should stop appearing as such and delegate



pastoral issues to the SEN team. But positions had become entrenched. Senior staff at viewed Laura as a threat and Laura found reason to continue to feel that members of staff were the enemy. The advice of the psychologist was not followed. In this high school there was an uneasy division between the SEN support system and the pastoral system. Eventually Laura defied a senior member of school staff openly in front of dozens of children. She was given a fixed term exclusion and the possibility of future permanent exclusion loomed large. The process of obtaining a Statement of SEN (now called an EHC plan) was begun.

Laura received a Statement of SEN but, even with this level of recognition and associated funding, her days in that high school were numbered. She joined a different high school via the 'managed transfer' arrangement. The 'managed transfer' mechanism receives mixed reviews. They prove a tenuous arrangement for some children. A review by Bagley and Hallam (2016) explores different rationales, outcomes and child perspectives across local authorities. Messeter and Soni (2017) provide a literature review. Laura was permanently excluded from the second high school within weeks due to a confrontational incident, sparked by a dispute over cigarette smoking. She was then unable to return to her first high school. Had her reputation preceded her? Do teachers across schools discuss children like Laura in private? We will never know. For Laura, the process of enrolling at another high school and being, once again, permanently excluded was enacted. But from that point onwards things improved for her because she began to take control of matters herself. Having been excluded from two high schools her choices were narrowing but she still had choices. She voluntarily enrolled at a special school designated SEBD. She did this because she wanted to take her GCSE examinations, something the special school offered - Laura had career ambitions. On making

discreet inquiries some months later the psychologist learned that Laura was doing well at her new school. Staff there were 'relaxed' about older students smoking cigarettes at break times. Laura's story will not be unfamiliar of other educational psychologists.

What is there to learn here? The story of Laura contains parallels with John's story in chapter four. The question - should the educational psychologist be involved in such a case? - is relevant. Repeated permanent exclusions are, sadly, not an uncommon event (Allan, 2006). Laura's educational psychologist invested a lot of time in Laura's case. She was, as Mercieca (2011) called it, working 'beyond conventional boundaries'. Mercieca writes: "The virtuous practitioner allows time for circumspection, understanding that the presentation of a difficulty does not necessitate an immediate solution, contrary to expectation" (p.126). But sometimes the educational psychologist does a lot of work to no obvious beneficial effect – but how would she know this in advance? How do we grade ethical commitment? Is the unit of currency the investment of time or is it sensitivity to case features? Different people see different things when looking at the same child. The fictional story of Laura is likely to be representative of the story of many children at risk of exclusion and referred to the educational psychologist. In anticipation of the paragraphs to follow, I would note that Laura chose to fight like a hawk rather than to submit like a dove. This was her adaptive choice.

**(ii) game theory: why most children choose to behave properly**

In *The selfish gene* (Dawkins, 1976) a picture emerges of a primordial Earth where a multitude of primitive genes swim in the oceans, each one competing with other genes to survive. Some genes survive and some die, i.e. the successful ones are replicated, the unsuccessful ones become extinct. Genes that embody survivability thrive and gain in complexity. In combination

with other genes, and over millions of years, collections of successful, now far more complex genes come to be represented in the different species that have since evolved on Earth, including mankind. In this story a solitary, complex life form is made up of a pastiche of micro-organisms co-existing and co-evolving in a primordial swamp. But for Dawkins the individual gene is the prime unit of evolutionary currency whereas for Darwin ([1859] 1985) it was the individual organism. For Dawkins anything that promotes the survival of the individual gene is the relevant factor in the survival of the creature itself. For Dawkins survival of the gene is primary and survival of the organism is secondary. How, he asks, does the much-larger creature behave so as to maximize its chances of survival? Surely the answer lies in the decisions made by the larger organism itself when faced with a choice of behaviour where its survival is put at risk? The ontological nugget captured here is that complex creatures can make a conscious decision that will alter their destinies.

In *The God delusion*, Dawkins cites Smith (1979) and describes game theory, which explains how the life of the individual gene and of the whole creature itself are played out in practice. Game theory is the 'evolutionary stable strategy' that determines the actions of the individual, be it gene or organism (Dawkins, *ibid*, p.249). If an action benefits either then the gene and organism survive and are replicated in future generations. To keep the argument manageable I will remain consistent with Darwin ([1859] 1985) and locate the agent of change in the organism and I will ignore the valency of the gene. And I will move immediately to the organism of the human being and two classes of behaviour - the 'misbehaviour' of the child and the mechanisms of behavioural control exerted by adults in school.

Smith's game theory might be looked at as a 'what's in it for me?' test in a situation where the organism, presented with a choice, decides on one course of action instead of another.

Whether the organism's 'choice of action' is conscious or unconscious is an important issue explored in later chapters of this thesis. What matters here is that the evolved organism – the adult or the child – *decides* what to do mainly on the basis of 'what's in it for me?' reasoning.

This seems to be a rather selfish attitude to take and in its simplified version no doubt it is. It does not seem to take account of the complex behaviour choices that benefit other people, for example when the human being *chooses* to act to the benefit of his fellow man, woman or child, i.e. altruistically. For Dawkins and Smith altruism has associated with it a high survival value for the social group, for the individual. The altruistic person trades pro-social behaviour choices in the present for longer-term gains of personal survival in the group.

Applying Smith's argument to the plight of Laura, if she believed that the the school rules were likely to be played out fairly, consistently and predictably then she would sooner or later decide to 'play the school game'. This would represent adaptive behaviour. This choice might also be recognized by the members of staff as altruistic or moral or 'good'. But in a complex, changing world beliefs are tested. For most children the occasional stressful situation faced - perhaps an argument with a peer, the unavoidable infringement of a school rule or the face-to-face encounter with a member of the school management team - can, by and large, be ignored. It would remain more advantageous for most children to rely on the long-term viability of so-called altruistic responses. Disputing to this line of reasoning, Laura 'decided' that the rules of school were not being fairly applied and it was better for her long-term survival to fight those

who stood before her, those poised to fight her. Laura's choice was adaptive. Her story can be read as one of personal ascendancy over perceived persecution.

So, too, for many other children facing permanent exclusion from school. According to game theory, to adhere strictly to school rules might not be their best choice. For these children, school situations are confusing, unpredictable and stressful. For these children, the rules are felt to be applied harshly and unfairly by unforgiving members of school staff who are waiting to see them fail. They witness inconsistencies in the application of school rules. They note the regular violations of school rules by other pupils, which are ignored by members of staff. They see favouritism granted towards the attractive student, the son of a school governor or the gifted athlete who starred in the county finals. These *unsuccessful* children sometimes become disaffected. They find more advantage in fighting a system that does not work for them than in 'playing the school game'. Dawkins repeats Smith's example of the adaptive fighting displays by hawks and doves (Dawkins, 2007, p.75). Some children at risk of school exclusion see more advantage in fighting like a hawk than submitting like a mildly-aggrieved dove. Game theory explains why children sometimes choose to misbehave - it is for adaptive reasons. This theory offers a viable explanation for the behaviour of many disaffected children in school. But most people have read neither Dawkins (*ibid*) nor Smith (*ibid*). Most people, I imagine, view the issue of child misbehaviour in terms of the child's morally-governed conduct and *his own* behaviour choices as emanating from *his own* personal and moral system of beliefs. The matter of morals deserves a closer look.

### (iii) the origin of a child's moral code

Dawkins (*ibid*) feels that we do not derive our morals from God, philosophers of the past or from a study of the scriptures. He pauses to wonder where we do get our morals from? The origins of moral theory have been discussed at length by MacIntyre (2007) but I am unable to devote the degree of attention to MacIntyre that his treatise deserves. Darwin ([1874] 2009), as noted in a previous chapter, implicates evolutionary force in relation to the development of morality in human societies. The subject matter is steeped in difficulty. Two quotes from MacIntyre (*ibid*) pertain:

“ ... it is only possible to understand the dominant moral culture of advanced modernity adequately from a standpoint external to that culture” (p.ix).

And:

“My explanation was and is that the (moral) precepts that are thus uttered were once at home in, and intelligible in terms of, a context of practical beliefs and of supporting habits of thought, feeling and action, a context that has since been lost, a context in which moral judgements were understood as governed by impersonal standards justified by a shared conception of the human good” (p.ix. My insertion of the word 'moral' to improve readability).

The sense of something difficult to pin down returns. It is as though it is only possible for the educational psychologist to properly view the processes, the behaviours, indeed the rituals of school exclusion if she stands apart from them. Being an 'outsider' *and* an educational psychologist can sometimes have its advantages. For MacIntyre (*ibid*) our morals, thoughts and

behaviour choices are invisible to ourselves and are acutely sensitive to unseen socio-historical influences. Dawkins (*ibid*) envisages simple evolutionary adaptations:

“Driving our moral judgements is a universal moral grammar, a faculty of the mind that has evolved over millions of years to include a set of principles for building a range of possible moral systems. As with language, the principles that make up our moral grammar fly beneath the radar of our awareness” (p.257).

The issue of morality in the matter of school exclusion is important. Moral precepts relating to permanent school exclusion seem befuddled, at least in England. Individuals, schools and local authorities who and which act to make permanent exclusion a reality for a child presumably subscribe to a belief system that finds justification in school exclusion. No doubt in ages gone by stocks were used, witches named and the Ship of Fools that Foucault writes about made ready to launch (Foucault, 1967, p.5). One might be forgiven for expressing personal doubt to the notion that reason, rational discussion, the applications of logic and the tools of social scientific inquiry will help us to understand the social phenomenon of school exclusion.

#### **(iv) a critique of Dawkins' work**

*The God delusion* is not a seminal work of philosophical inquiry but I gleaned from it some of the thought experiments pursued in this chapter. Dawkins (2007) adopts a strongly evolutionary line of inquiry and remains entertaining to a wide audience but offers limited treatment of the central issue of morality. Dawkins' citation of Smith (*ibid*) offers a simplistic, mechanistic view of social action. According to Dawkins the linkage between a gene, in which the agency of biological action is animated, and the organism and the complex social behaviour of human beings in contemporary society is tenuous, to say the least. Part of my recent

research activity was reading Schutz ([1932] 1967), a text which provides a more-thorough treatment of the subject of social action, albeit from a phenomenological perspective. There is not space to contrast the works of Dawkins (*ibid*), Darwin, MacIntyre (*ibid*) and Schutz (*ibid*) in terms of morality or social action. In outlining the following belief positions I am not trying to say that the phenomenon of permanent school exclusion is simple or sorted - I am looking for a way to unlock my thinking about it.

**(v) thought experiments deriving from Dawkins' work**

***belief***

This thesis cannot do enough justice to the subject of human belief. We act because we think we have decided to so act. We decide because we think we have weighed all the possibilities. We imagine that we think in the same way that the great philosophers of past and present did. And about all this, belief is not the end product - it was there all along. We believe because we act and we act because we believe.

In terms of religious belief Dawkins is an atheist. He drives hard into what, for many, is a sensitive subject, weighing arguments carefully. He outlines five belief positions, asking the reader to consider where they stand in terms of belief or disbelief in a spiritual God. He explores the positions of theist, deist, polytheist, agnostic and atheist in relation to religious beliefs. Tentatively I applied these belief positions directly to the subject of school exclusion. Space permits me to give but a flavour of three comparisons - theism, polytheism and agnosticism.



**theism:** In terms of religious belief the theist believes in the existence of one God, the three most-common being Allah (the Muslim faith), HaShem (Judaism) and Jesus Christ (Christianity). The theist God is an existential being and a spiritual being, an omnipotent, all-knowing entity who perceives everything imaginable in the universe. In terms of one's belief in the matter of school exclusion one theist position is a child centred one. This position elevates the phenomenological experience of the child excluded above all other considerations. Accordingly, no child should ever be excluded from his school for any reason whatsoever, just like no person should be deprived of food. The sentiments of the headteacher, Howard, at the beginning of chapter two contains flavours of this child-centred position tempered by pragmatism. That is my interpretation, of course, not Howard's.

**polytheism:** The religious polytheist believes in the existence of many Gods whose relationship with one another is complex but can, through endeavour, be fathomed, as specific rules govern these relationships. Examples of polytheist faith are the Hindu religion and the Greek religion. Dawkins noted that, with the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the archangels – some fallen – the devil himself and the saints, Roman Catholicism is arguably a polytheist religion, although the Catholic community would probably not agree. In terms of school exclusion the polytheist recognizes the influence of many factors in the aetiology of school exclusion: changes in society, changes in schools policy, the phenomenological experiences of the child, changes in curriculum, changes in employment opportunities, changes in government, etc. Arguably, Miller (2004) frames his review of problem behaviour in school children in a polytheist way.

**atheism:** In terms of religious belief, the atheist has carefully considered the arguments supporting deism, theism, polytheism and agnosticism and rejected them all on logical and

scientific grounds. The atheist believes that there is no God and therefore no involvement of any God or Gods in the affairs of humankind. He does not 'sit on the fence', so to speak, he finds the proposition ridiculous. In terms of school exclusion the atheist has given up any hope of trying to fathom why so many children are permanently excluded from school. I suspect that many parents of excluded children become atheists of this persuasion. The tone of this thesis locates me as an atheist. But there are dangers of admitting any sort of atheism - one risks being misunderstood. This is because atheism, whether in relation to school exclusion or religious belief, is antagonistic to other belief positions. It does not stand above them but it threatens them.

### ***the memeplex around school exclusion***

Words indeed have a life of their own. We exist in a world of words. The power of words to influence our behaviour is well documented, not the least by Jones (2003), who sees a deliberate intention of government to divorce debate about behaviour in schools from matters of SEN. Other writers describe the power of writing forms. From Bakhtin (1981) I see that my own preference in writing seems to be to favour a style lying somewhere between narrative, epic and novel. But, according to Dawkins, words themselves serve as agents of operant conditioning. In relation to much-used and overly-familiar words, phrases and word strings Dawkins (1976) came up with the notion of the meme. He expanded on this idea in *Viruses of the mind* (downloaded at <http://vxheaven.org/lib/static/vdat/epvirmnd.htm> on 12 October 2016). Dawkins (1976, 2007) describes a meme as a replicator like the gene, which for Dawkins (1976) is the prime replicator. A meme is a word or phrase or word formula that, once spoken, takes on a self-replicating, self-generating life of its own until it becomes a unit of cultural

inheritance - or perishes, as did the dinosaurs. In society we witness their birth all the time but extinction passes silently. Some contemporary examples are: 'Google it'; 'God moves in mysterious ways' and 'There are some children you just cannot help' and all the others in list 3, below.

Memes are, according to Dawkins, subject to evolutionary force. Valuable ones - the ones that can thrive in their habitat - live on, useless ones die out and become extinct. But what, we may ask, constitutes value here? Nothing more exciting than survival for its own sake. Dawkins suggests that if a meme has any utility it is used and its value in the human meme pool (called the memeplex) expands. Considering the memes that apply to school exclusion, presumably they evolved through a rapid, unconscious emergence of meaning based on previously-used memes. The birth of a meme is fostered by shifts in cultural trends and what is commonly said in one country, however, might not be commonly said in another - memes cross oceans and mountain ranges at their peril. Is there a value in identifying the memes that apply to school exclusion? I have attempted this below.

***list 3: the memeplex surrounding permanent exclusion from school***

(words spoken by key adults in the school in relation to the child at risk of exclusion)

"It's for his own good".

"We, as a school, can go no further".

"You just can't help some children – their needs are too great".

"We simply cannot meet his SEN".

"No pupil who is permanently excluded is ever re-admitted to this school". - this meme is now enshrined in recent government advice to local authorities (DfE July 2015, p.5)

“Too many bridges have been burned”.

“He needs a fresh start”.

“He needs to be educated in a place where his can be needs”.

“We wish him all the best in his new school – wherever that may be”.

“His older brother was very similar – he was also excluded – but, strangely, his younger sister seems OK”.

Perhaps the most insidious meme - one which continues to haunt me as a social truth because I have repeated it myself a number of times - I first heard 20 years ago. It was spoken by a local authority officer in the North East of England, about a child excluded/ not excluded from school: “His status needs to be confirmed - whilst he is not permanently excluded he cannot be helped”.

Is there is any value in learning to spot the memplex as it emerges in an uncomfortable meeting in school? It is possibly an early sign that the projects of reasoned discussion and logical consideration of alternatives are about to be, if not abandoned, then at least suspended. The psychologist, I would argue, is better prepared when sooner prepared.

#### **(vi) are we even asking the right questions?**

So complex is the subject of school exclusion that it is worth taking a step back to wonder whether we are even asking the right questions about it? Sometimes we show the tendency to become fixated on the wrong questions. Dawkins gives the example of the moth (Dawkins, 2007, p.201), the familiar question being: 'Why does the moth fly into the flame?' Dawkins' explanation is much better than the inexplicable suicide theory that most of us cling to. Based

on Darwinian evolutionary theory Dawkins suggests that the moth uses celestial bodies, such as the moon, to navigate its flight path. The flame is, in the perception of the moth, a celestial body and the moth has adapted its flight behaviour over generations so to keep the celestial body at a specific angle to its compound eye when maintaining its flight path. Normally, this strategy helps the moth to navigate its way home or to its other destinations. However, being a flame, the light is proximal and not distal, as the moon is; and at diminishing near points the moth adjusts its flight path to keep the beacon at the specific angle that it has learned to. This explains the moth's logarithmically decreasing flight path around, and eventually extinction into, the flame. The moth example highlights Dawkins' point, i.e. that the initial question - 'Why does the moth fly into the flame?' - is the wrong question. It should be: 'Why is the moth flying towards a flame that will eventually consume its life?' Can we apply this thought experiment to school exclusion?

Consider one question regarding school exclusion: why do senior figures in schools and in the local authority continue to permanently exclude pupils when most of the research exposes the practice as questionable, aggressive, unfair, sometimes immoral, sometimes illogical and always financially expensive? Perhaps this is the wrong question? Perhaps we can seek guidance from MacIntyre, who reminds us that we must observe a problematic social phenomenon from a greater distance. Sometimes the educational psychologist will find herself too involved and too close, as Adam's psychologist in chapter three was. It is difficult to be dispassionate and distant when one is involved, confused and hurting.

I am not attempting to provide the right question here. I do not know what it is. I would simply raise the point that the crucial processes and decisions in relation to permanent exclusions

from school are not necessarily available to rational forms of inquiry. In the next chapter I explain how these processes and decisions are possibly enacted by groups of people who are acting unconsciously as part of a group that does not necessarily see itself as a group. As I will describe, this group is not confined to the 'here and now', it is not bound by logic; and it not held accountable for its behaviour and its decisions. For the present I note that, although the question above seems to make sense, it implies that the senior figures in schools and the local authority *can* answer them. I think they cannot.

**(vii) the danger of making an avoidable permanent exclusion from school**

Permanent exclusions from school may have an immense, negative impact on the children who receive them. It is difficult to know, since the subject area receives only limited coverage (Pirrie and Macleod, 2009). The research that does exist points to negative future outcomes for the children concerned (Berridge *et al*, 2001, cited in this thesis, ch3vi). McCrystal *et al* (2007) notes: "Exclusion from school represents for many young people the first step in exclusion from society" (p.37). But, I would argue, avoidable acts of school exclusion also affect those children not excluded because they stand as witnesses to the unfolding spectacle. They learn from the behaviours of the adults who teach and guide them. Children are susceptible to persuasion, something that Dawkins makes very clear. What exactly are we persuading them to accept in respect of school exclusion?

Dawkins (2007) does not discuss exclusion from school. His book is primarily concerned with religious belief. He highlights the worldwide practice of indoctrinating children into religious belief cults when they are at an age at which they cannot, for themselves, question such beliefs. He cites the Roman Catholic, Amish and Muslim religions as representative, three of many.

Appending Dawkins' arguments to what might be called the cult of school exclusion, we might ask ourselves: are we indoctrinating our children to accept, or at the very least bear silent witness to, the socially divisive events of permanent exclusion from school? Are we habituating them to a future social world where unjust episodes of social exclusion will occur at regular intervals? Are we making our children passive witnesses to another dubious practice of social division? After all, these are *their* schools more than ours and the future belongs to them more than it does to us.

I have painted a one-sided picture of the matter and I need to step back a little. Schools would not function smoothly if children questioned the relevance of the National Curriculum in the middle of the Science lesson. Schools would not function smoothly if many children spoke out about perceived inconsistencies in adult behaviour in relation to the school discipline and conduct policies. And schools would not function smoothly if an angry group of older children made public protest over what they saw as the impatient, illogical and unreasonable exclusion of one of their newest and most vulnerable members. Such things must be avoided at all costs! Children, it could be argued, are *necessarily* indoctrinated by schools to accept all things school, including acts of social exclusion directed at *the children who deserve it*. This is the *status quo* and, as calculated earlier (this thesis, ch3ii), up to two million of seven million school children bear witness this spectacle during their school years. Dawkins quotes James Dobson: 'Those that control what young people are taught, and what they experience – what they see, hear, think and believe – will determine the future course of the nation' (*ibid*, p.206). What, we may wonder, will be the future course of our nation in respect of social exclusion in general?

The adults who run our schools do need the children to subscribe to the notion of a properly-run school. They need them to accept the validity of the National Curriculum. The adults need the children to accept that they will follow adult direction, fairly quickly and predictably. They need them to accept the notion that some types of behaviour are unacceptable. *And they need them to accept that some children will necessarily be permanently excluded.* The children are required to believe that the adults who exclude are behaving correctly. It is clear that it is the adults who have a long list of additional needs that the children must respond to. Cynically I would argue that, in order to ensure *the right level of pupil conditioning*, the adults who run schools need to release just *the right amount of information* about the permanent exclusion pending. Too little information would be counterproductive, too much would threaten the adults' preserve. Here are some examples:

***list 4: details of an exclusion that the other children should see***

- the 'misbehaving' child repeatedly 'misbehaving' in the school
- the senior member of staff arriving in the classroom to contain or remove the child
- the child's uncomfortable body language when being confronted about his behaviour
- the child's absence from lessons (and learning) following his exclusions
- the 'inadvertently-voiced', negative memplex spoken about the child
- the knowledge filtering through the school that the child has left the school *for good* - even though 'good' is rarely defined.

***list 5: details of a permanent exclusion that the other children must not see***

- the behaviour log showing the details of the child's 'problem behaviour', giving date, time, location and the names of the involved adult



- the letter of exclusion that the parent of the excluded child receives
- the words spoken in a private meeting to the excluded child and his parent by staff
- the private discussions in the management team about the child to be excluded
- the formal deliberations of school governors and local authority officers
- details about post-exclusion arrangements for the excluded child a
- the excluded child's interpretation and story about all this.

***list 6: details of a permanent exclusion that no adult should see***

- accurate records, year on year, on the incidence rate of permanent exclusions in that LA
- a comparison of exclusion rates across all schools in that local authority
- a comparison of exclusion rates across local authorities in England and in other British and European nations
- the views of children excluded and the views of their parents
- the hard, corroborated evidence that proved that the permanent exclusion was fair and just
- the hard follow-up data about what happened next to all excluded children in the months and years following permanent exclusion
- the results of an independent, local authority-funded inquiry into the matter of permanent school exclusion
- 'cold case analysis' of avoidable exclusions replete with clear, achievable, future action points (Clarke, 2004)
- the true economic cost of permanent exclusion.

From the lists above lessons emerge: (i) permanent exclusion from school is a carefully staged social event; (ii) the event is not administered objectively; (iii) the need for permanent

exclusion from school is a sort of managed social construction; and (iv) the other children shall bear witness to carefully chosen aspects of this social ritual.

From the organisational perspective what matters is that the end justifies the means - and the details about those means shall be kept secret. Is this a form of indoctrination? Humphrey (1998) notes: "Children ... have a human right not to have their minds crippled by exposure to other people's bad ideas – no matter who these other people are" (p.779). The link I have made between school exclusion, indoctrination and religious zeal is tenuous. I have not written enough to prove anything. But have I written enough to cast doubt on the the nature of the primary question? It might only be: 'What is wrong with permanent exclusion from school?' But: 'What effect does the event have on the impressionable young minds of those who witness it?' The question might easily be extended to: 'What is wrong with our society?' Because if there is something wrong with *English society* then it will have its representations not only inside of our schools but outside also. For example, the other side of the unreasonable exclusion of the most underprivileged child is the exceptional inclusion of the most privileged child. My thoughts on the matter are tainted by reading Sampson (1962) but further exploration of the topic lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

#### **(viii) summary of this chapter**

In this chapter I explored the work of Dawkins, an evolutionist who re-affirms Darwinian theories of evolutionary change. He, too, is a scientist of the positivist persuasion. He cites Smith (*ibid*) who tells us why most children behave well most of the time. I applied Smith's lessons to the fictional story of Laura, who chose to fight like a hawk rather than suffer like a dove, before eventually choosing to vote with her feet. I made a cursory examination of the

part that morality plays, beginning with MacIntyre (*ibid*). The subject matter is steeped in difficulty. Smith (*ibid*), Darwin ([1874] 2009) and Dawkins (2007) take different positions on the matter. In chapter three explored my deep sense of doubt, my deep misgivings about finding reason in familiar and traditional forms of social scientific inquiry into the matter of school exclusion. Taking my lead from Dawkins, I delved into my hidden beliefs - or rather lack of them - about school exclusion. I found myself to be an atheist in the sense that I doubted the impact of logic, reason, research and moral guidance. I considered the memplex around the words used when discussing school exclusion. This exercise, I found, did not add much rigor to my study but it did provide another modicum of personal therapy. I wondered whether we are even asking the right questions about school exclusion? Is the problem about the numbers of children excluded? If so, take your pick - is it zero, eighty or over 100,000 annually? Or should the numbers apply to the millions of impressionable, innocent, child observers who bear witness to this pernicious form of social exclusion? Are we, in ridding our schools of *these challenging children*, putting at risk a generation of young, impressionable minds? What effect does our behaviour have on them, the children who watch? From Dawkins I learn how to ask searching questions. I drew the inspiration to continue with my study of permanent school exclusion. In the next two chapters I explore alternative perspectives in my search to understand the madness of the school exclusion phenomenon.

## **chapter six: the work of Bion**

“Society has not yet been driven to seek treatment of its psychological disorders by psychological means because it has not achieved sufficient insight to appreciate the nature of its distress” (Bion, 1961, p.14).

In this chapter I explore the powerful, unconscious and sometimes debilitating dynamics that occur in human groups, in institutions and in society in general. I introduce the work of Wilfred Bion (1961). I then look at the behaviour of groups that come together and decide to permanently exclude a child from school. My application of Bion's work is an academic demonstration of meaning. My interpretation of his work is not necessarily shared by others.

This chapter is organised as follows:

- (i) fictional story: Thomas
- (ii) Bion's work, and basic assumption mentalities
- (iii) more esoteric features of group behaviour
- (iv) an application of Bion's work to the story of Thomas
- (v) an application of Bion's work to a group meeting of professionals
- (vi) can Bion's insights help us understand school exclusion?
- (vii) a critique of Bion's work
- (viii) summary of this chapter

### **(i) fictional story: Thomas**

Thomas was a Year 9 student. His case was referred to the educational psychologist because he had tried to harm another child in school. His assault was severe and members of staff had to

act quickly to prevent a serious injury occurring. The psychologist had worked in the school for a number of years and her involvement in this matter was routine. She learnt that Thomas was displaying very unsettled behaviour for unknown reasons. Some teachers considered him to be 'different'. Thomas had told members of staff about future aggressive acts that he intended to carry out on the children he disliked. His friends deserted him and he became socially isolated. He was temporarily excluded from the high school until 'something was sorted'. The educational psychologist attended an emergency meeting in the school where she met Thomas' mother. The headteacher chaired the meeting and three other senior members of school staff and a local authority casework officer also attended. There was little in the way of written information presented. Thomas had not shown significantly problematic behaviour before. There was no written description of the recent serious incident - it was assumed that everybody knew about it. Thomas did not have a Statement of special educational needs and was considered to be academically able.

The headteacher began the meeting: "There has been a serious incident, that I will recount for the benefit of the two representatives from the local authority". His 'recounting' was brief and he immediately added a closing rider directed at Thomas' mother: "As a school, we are in a position where we do not believe that we can meet your son's needs". This was said as a statement of fact. Thomas' mother, who was a small person, quiet by nature, simply sat there and nodded. Often she held her head down, her body language suggesting that she was being 'told off'. Her journey from being 'welcome to the school' through 'we have concerns' to 'we do not believe that we can meet your son's needs' was a short one.

The educational psychologist sat and considered things. She became sensitive to unspoken things that were occurring. For example, the meeting was held in the headteacher's office and he sat at the end of a long, teak table, as though 'in charge' of a business meeting. At the beginning, as people began arriving, he was sat facing his computer, to one side. Thomas' mother sat further down the table facing a small phalanx of concerned-looking teachers. She looked troubled and was clearly waiting to say something important. The psychologist spoke as soon as possible, speaking slowly, directing her words at Thomas' mother, talking about obvious things that any young boy needs - parental love, to attend school regularly, to have friends with whom he can relax, to have good sleeping, eating, toileting and leisure habits. Thomas, she said, needed to learn to trust people, develop his self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Her words were measured and they had the desired effect - they permitted Thomas' mother to speak.

The ensuing minutes were tense and dominated by Thomas' mother's expression of significant emotional suffering located in the past. Saying the words served to unlock her pent-up emotions. At first she cried, as if overwhelmed by the magnitude of what she wanted to say. She hung her head low, submissively, as if fearing that the group was about to attack her. She talked about her own troubled childhood and said that she did not want Thomas' life to be like her own. She then went into details about her past. The other people at the meeting found this difficult to listen to, possibly because they were unprepared for it. But her words conveyed the depth of family suffering that Thomas, no doubt, was affected by. They provided a sort of explanation for Thomas' behaviour. The educational psychologist made the point that Thomas' mother seemed unable to separate her deep suffering located in the past from her thoughts

about how to help her son in the present. The psychologist made this point for benefit of the others present, giving them permission to listen, to feel uncomfortable and to remain silent. She said that it was important for people to know about Thomas' mother's past. The psychologist also said: "The main objective of this meeting has been reached". But she was unsure why she said that. It was apparent to those at the meeting that Thomas required significant support to help him continue with his education.

From there on the meeting returned to the business-like form it began with. Plans were made for Thomas' phased return to school. Plans were made for people, including the psychologist, to speak further with Thomas, hear his story and source his views. Some weeks later the local authority, having taken written advice from those involved, arranged for Thomas to be educated at a specialist resource for older students with emotional needs. This was an expensive resource, something not offered lightly. With a little persuasion Thomas' mother agreed to the placement, as did Thomas. Follow-up showed that Thomas benefited from the change of school. His case was not recorded as a permanent exclusion.

What messages does this story hold? The initial 'business-like' beginnings of the meeting fit with the organizational psychology approach described by Miller (2004, p.193). The story typifies how the educational psychologist might find herself immediately 'in the thick of it' in the course of her work with children at risk of exclusion. At first, the process of the meeting was enacted rapidly. She was aware that Thomas' mother had something significant to say. She was sensitive to the fact that Thomas' mother felt threatened or attacked. She managed these potentials by giving people a way of dealing with a difficult situation and they took it. Of note in

this story the psychologist did not 'save' Thomas from his effectual exclusion from the high school. I offer more interpretation of this story after my description of Bion's work.

**(ii) Bion's work, and basic assumption mentalities**

Like many educational psychologists who have read Bion's *Experiences in groups* (Bion, 1961) I was impressed. I think that this collection of papers provides vital preparation for professionals who attend meetings such as the fictional one described above. They provide a model to apply to the confusing, uncomfortable and frustrating events that occur in such meetings. They provide a way of being in contact with, not just the process of a meeting, but one's own emotional reactions to the powerful dynamics that are sometimes exposed or exist as undercurrents. The role of the psychologist often places her central to events in such stressful meetings. Reading Bion's work prepares her such that she can be of more help to the other adults in the meeting, in the way that Thomas' mother was helped. This form of 'knowing' can help professionals ascend above uncomfortable situations where 'something odd' is going on, something they cannot quite put their finger on. I will now describe aspects of Bion's unique work.

Bion's book is a set of papers written as a 'one-off'. He was a psychotherapist, influenced by the work of Freud (1900), Freud (1936) and Klein (1931, 1946). He published *Experiences in groups* whilst working at the Tavistock Institute in London. The book was his contribution to our understanding of what goes on in human groups from a psycho-analytical perspective. Through a close, clinical evaluation of the minutiae of the behaviour of the patients that he met in his group work, Bion revealed the powerful, unconscious group dynamics exposed when human beings come together in a group for the purpose of social and work engagement. Bion suggests



that the underlying dynamics that he describes in the patient groups he worked with occur also in larger, non-patient groups, such as in everyday life, in family groups, in the groups who are part of institutions, including businesses, schools, local authorities and government departments. But Bion concedes that a wider scientific application of the group phenomena he describes in his book is a long way off (p.113).

Bion was assigned to a military hospital wing as a psychiatrist during and just after the Second World War. He worked with servicemen recovering from battlefield trauma and associated neuroses. With 300 - 400 patients, it seemed impracticable for him to offer individual psychotherapy sessions. Group work seemed the only feasible solution. The servicemen had been used to operating under battlefield conditions where working in a group and by showing obedience to senior officers were expected norms of conduct. In the relative freedom of the rehabilitation wing battlefield conditions were absent, as were senior officers, and so the presenting problem for Bion was how to offer treatment that would benefit the patients. He developed a unique form of group therapy, his objective being the alleviation of neurosis and its associated symptoms using cost-effective and practical means.

Bion's first clinical objective was to ensure that the display of neurotic symptoms in the group became the primary aim of group work and that alleviation of those symptoms the second objective. He trialled an extended period of group work involving groups made up of service personnel plus some non-patient volunteers. Bion offers no description of group members beyond this. The details of this early exploratory work do not concern us here but the behaviour of individuals in the groups themselves does. In the usual setting Bion would sit with a group of seven to nine patients and they would talk. His observations about those early group

encounters are fascinating to read. For example he deliberately sought *not* to lead the group. Whenever possible he elected to observe the group and the interactions of its members. Occasionally, he offered verbal observations to the group based on the pragmatic rules that an interpretation of the behaviour witnessed was obvious to him but not to others; and, secondly, that members of the group might benefit from hearing his interpretation. In this way Bion developed his contributions to group therapy.

Bion's observations about groups meeting for the first time were that they made an uncomfortable start. Group members would assemble at a predetermined time and sit on chairs arranged in a circle. Whilst they were waiting for Bion to 'begin' conversation between pairs of people would take place. However, Bion never 'began' the session – he just sat there. After a while the group would fall silent, the silence being followed by renewed conversation between pairs of people. And the group would fall silent once more. The focus of the group would then fall upon Bion himself. This focus became acute, intense and obvious both to Bion and to the group as a whole. Bion would confess to the group that he was feeling anxious, that he detected that the group were expecting something of him that he was not prepared to give. Usually this admission had a negative effect on the group and a general expression of discontent manifested itself. Bion then attempted to expose and clarify the intense feelings he detected. He would ask the group what it was that they expected of him?

Despite this seemingly shaky start the group would continue to meet – very few people elected to leave the group even though participation was voluntary. From the outset, it seemed, the group offered the adults something they needed. An important group experience was thus revealed – being part of the group offered individuals the fulfilment of a vital human need,

begging the question: precisely what was this need? In all of Bion's groups, fascinating conversations between patients took place; and expressions of deep emotional content were made, sometimes elucidated by Bion and discussed further by the group.

Difficult-to-understand behavioural interaction patterns occurred and Bion made careful note of them. After a time he was able to identify some of the repeating patterns, revealing the powerful dynamics that occur in groups. Bion noted, for example, that in the group that meets for therapy, emotions were always intense and confused. Feelings of frustration, boredom, exasperation and relief were commonly demonstrated and often verbally articulated. It seemed apparent to Bion that all individuals in the group consciously or unconsciously wanted their personal needs satisfied, if not by Bion himself, then by the other people in the group. People, Bion noted, tended to contribute to the group as anonymous individuals as though in the brief moments when they spoke, they were invisible. Individuals were also preoccupied by what the group might be thinking about them. Bion observed a number of common patterns occurring in group behaviour. Some of these are now described. The first three are termed basic assumption mentalities (Bion, *ibid*, p.63), which refer to group mental states that drive the often-unconscious behaviour patterns seen in groups. The fourth pattern, work group activity, was not described as a basic assumption mentality by Bion himself but some argue that it is useful to consider it such (French and Simpson, 2010).

***basic assumption mentality of a group characterised by fight/flight (baF)***

Bion notes:

“... what is the basic assumption in a group about people who meet together in a group?

The basic assumption is that people come together as a group for the purpose of preserving the group” (p.63).

And:

“It is assumed that if the human being as a gregarious animal chooses a group he does so to fight or run away from something” (pp.64-45).

And:

“.. the group seems to know only two techniques of self-preservation, fight or flight” (p.63).

People, it seems, gather in groups for a purpose, although that purpose might sometimes be unclear, diverted, may remain undiscovered or may lie incipient for a long time. Typically, Bion noted, people in groups of any size of more than two individuals have a tendency to either fight one another or run away from one another. Bion describes this as a fight/flight basic assumption mentality and gives it the notation *baF*. Fight/flight behaviour can be physical, verbal, evidenced by body language or in behaviour choices or the facial expressions of group members. One demonstrable fight tactic is leaving the group or refusing to attend it. Fight/flight seems to be a common pattern of behaviour in human groups of any size, sublimated, one can imagine, through organized sporting activities, the combative rhetoric of family debate or similar, popular forms of expression. Fight/flight behaviour can be seen in the repeating patterns of fighting behaviour witnessed in modern society, parliamentary question time, professional boxing and episodes in of international conflict. Bion sees fight/flight behaviour as a strategy to preserve the existence of the group and I am unable not to read into

his work an ancestral, human, anthropoid origin to the phenomenon. But Bion does not extend his work in this direction. A Darwinian explanation of the tendency of humans to live in groups for evolutionary advantage is not inconsistent with Bion's ideas. Jaynes (1976), in the next chapter, offers fascinating thoughts about the evolution of complex, human societies and the enduring traces in today's societies of the ancestral origins of our group behaviour. Towards the end of *Experiences in groups* Bion gives a detailed explanation for all group mentalities, including fight/flight, based on psychodynamic theory. The interested reader might pursue this explanation at its source. I found the latter part of Bion's book difficult to understand.

***basic assumption mentality of a group characterised by pairing (baP)***

It could be argued from a starkly evolutionist perspective that two adult omnivores or carnivores come together for one of three purposes – to kill and eat the other, to be killed and eaten by the other or to consider mating. Such primitive inspirations predate the skills of symbiotic relationships, peaceful coexistence and cooperative living. The human being, the omnivore and the social animal, has evolved beyond the primitive condition described above but nevertheless people who come together in groups succumb to powerful, irresistible dynamics including a strong pairing tendency. The desire to pair with another group member or the desire for the whole group to adopt a pairing group mentality explain unusual events in the behaviour of individuals in a group. Bion gives the basic assumption dynamic of pairing the notation *baP*:

“... some patterns of behaviour were recurring and, in particular, one that went like this: two members of the group would become involved in a discussion ... it would be evident that they were involved with each other” (p 61).

And:

“Whenever two people begin to have this kind of relationship in the group – whether these two are man and woman, man and man, or woman and woman – it seems to be a basic assumption, held both by the group and the pair concerned, that the relationship is a sexual one” (pp.61-62).

Pairing gambits can be seen in the behaviour of individuals who meet as a group. They include sitting next to, and moving closer to, the group member one is pairing with, looking closely at them, agreeing with them, smiling at them and generally demonstrating the desire to 'mate', if only in the socially-expansive sense. A pairing mentality provides a vital break from fight/flight mentality, the latter being the most common dynamic witnessed in group interactions. Fight/flight mentality is not always satisfying for members of the group and tends to consume a lot of energy and requires close attention from all group participants. The tendency to make pairs offers a readily-available alternative. As Bion notes: “I accordingly interpreted their behaviour as a manipulation of the group; they were trying to break up the fight/flight culture by establishing pair relationships” (p.72).

***basic assumption mentality of group characterised by leadership-dependency (baD)***

A group requires a leader. The leader is required to lead the group and demonstrate the skills required to ensure the preservation and continued existence of the group. A group meets for a purpose and this purpose is not always immediately clear. Hopefully, strong leadership takes the group beyond initial confusion and provides a 'higher purpose' than simply the preservation of the group:

“Either the desire for a leader is some emotional survival operating uselessly in the group as archaism, or else there is some awareness of a situation .. which demands the presence of such a person” (p.39).

The prevailing group mentality is understood by Bion as the unanimous expression of the will of the group (*ibid*, p.59). Part of this is that the group naturally looks to the leader, a person who can meet both group objectives and the needs of individual group members. A group, whose unconsciously-driven behaviour is characterised by its reliance for direction upon the leader, is behaving according to the basic assumption mentality of leadership-dependency; which is given the notation, *baD*. The group depends upon the leader, perhaps sometimes unreasonably so. This is because the group is looking for a purpose around which it can come together to agree its future actions. The leader has a difficult role to fulfil, something made more difficult because it may not be the role that he thinks it should be. In non-patient groups that meet in modern institutions, such as schools or places of work, the leader usually thinks that he was appointed to lead the group due to his qualification, his personal attributes and his suitability for the role. After all, he was appointed to the post. According to the organisational psychology perspective this is the correct foundation of leadership. But in the psychiatric groups that Bion based his work on, he saw a rather different role for the group leader. Bion's was a specialist role - he was not leading individuals who were always behaving rationally, he was working with patients many of whom were expressing neurotic symptoms. He found the demands upon him as leader were immense. Besides the complexity of his role, he detected inherent conflict for each and every group member, including himself, in being a part of a group:

“The individual is a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness'" (p.131).

Bion drew parallels between the behaviour witnessed in neurotic patient groups and the behaviour of non-patient groups that meet in society. I pause to reflect that, in my contact with groups of professionals in various fields of education, I have sometimes felt like Bion observing the neurotic behaviour of the group. I understand this feeling to be my sensitivity to the unconscious but powerful dynamics that I have detected yet have been unable to understand.

Individual group members require of the leader that he lead but also help them deal with the powerful emotions associated with pursuing primitive basic assumptions (*baF*, *baP* and *baD*) and with the conflict inherent in group membership. If there is any direct applicability of Bion's thoughts to the behaviour of people in groups in wider society then these primitive basic assumption mentalities must be operating powerfully on all individuals every day. But we fail to recognise these as they usually operate below the threshold of our consciousness. To make matters more complex and unpredictable, the individual has two distinct roles in the group – he is both a recognised group member and an anonymous, contributing critic. Given this complexity, the only way the leader can sustain his leadership role is to successfully manipulate the expressions of basic assumption mentality (*baF*, *baP* and *baD*) whilst upholding the illusion of leading a credible working group (described below). Sometimes the leader *is* successful in these orchestrations and is able to foster viable working group behaviour. But what is viable working group behaviour? Is it also a state of mind? Is it a basic assumption mentality itself? This, surely, is something that people like educational psychologists should know about.



### ***work group activity***

Bion (*ibid*) describes work group activity in a specific way (pp.143-146). In this section I compare our familiar, everyday experience of being part of a work group with Bion's description of this activity. I then introduce Bion's description of the specialised work group (pp.156-158), the latter being somewhat different. There are important differences between all three. I do this in recognition of the portability of these ideas to wider institutional settings. My summary cannot do justice to Bion's own words and so I begin with a quote from source (Bion, *ibid*):

“Every group, however casual, meets to ‘do’ something; in this activity ... they co-operate ... Since this activity is geared to a task, it is related to reality, its methods are rational, and, therefore, in however embryonic a form, scientific” (p.143).

The ordinary, typically, successful work group is very much a phenomenon of modern human society and almost certainly earlier of earlier anthropological stages (Mithen, 1996, p.20). Such groups are formed for reasons and the participants follow rules to pursue shared objectives. If the group's objectives are clearly specified, it meets at a prearranged time or signal to fulfil a specific task or set of tasks. An important feature of this work group is that individuals in the group engage in cooperative behaviour. I would suggest that in our modern world the groups that come together are *always* understood to be work groups of this type - or so we would like to think. Often, of course, they are. Having observed literally thousands of children learning in classroom groups and having previously worked in dozen service industries I concede that, for the most part, human groups function as described in this paragraph and according to the

previous quote. But, as we shall see, there are groups within groups and not all group dynamics are explained by reference to typical work group activity.

There exists an argument that, due to our history, due to influences of philosophers during and after the Age of Enlightenment, due to the evident march of *a particular sort of science* in the centuries preceding this one – which magnifies the contribution of some scientists, such as Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1872] 1999; [1874] 2009), Watson (1913) and Skinner (1953), but diminishes the contribution of others, such as James (1890), Fort (1919), Pierce (my source here being Buchler, [1940], (1955)) and Smedslund ([1997] 2009) - we have developed an unconscious and unquestioning reliance upon *a particular epistemology*. This is an epistemology that is concrete, mechanical, numerical and positivist in nature, as though, ontologically, the whole universe was a giant machine, the workings of which will one day be revealed. It is an epistemology that will 'find out', that will 'explain it all' (in *a particular sort of way*, of course) and will succeed in ensuring we reach all of our desired human goals. Some of these goals are recognised earlier in this thesis as tainted by anthropomorphic hyperbole (this thesis, ch4v). According to our unconscious prejudice - our acceptance of a particular view of the world and particular forms of science and social science - we *always* believe that the group we are currently a part of operates as a sophisticated, typical and successful working group. To suggest otherwise, as I am doing here, is to risk outright rejection.

This fits with our easy subscription to what I previously called a familiar and traditional epistemology. Bion's description of a work group is somewhat different than this (*ibid*, p.98). A group mentality characterised by its subscription to a work group ethic may be unable to resist the invasion of the other basic assumption mentalities (*baF*, *baP* and *baD*). As Bion notes:

“Work-group activity is obstructed, diverted and on occasion assisted, by certain other mental activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives. These activities, at first sight chaotic, are given certain cohesion if it is assumed that they spring from basic assumptions common to all the group” (p.146).

Sometimes in the typical work group, and more frequently when the focus of discussion is an emotive, sensitive or divisive topic - and almost always in the groups of neurotic patients that Bion worked with - basic assumption mentality prevails beyond the rational description given above. Normal work group activity is suspended and *baF*, *baP* or *baD* mentalities emerge as and when they do. When a group is motivated by basic assumption mentality archaic group dynamics emerge quickly, powerfully and seemingly inexplicably. Consider the group that met in school to discuss Thomas. The group was led by the headteacher whose intention it was to promote successful work group activity. But the project became usurped, as Bion might have predicted, by more basic assumption mentalities. The mentality, *baF*, emerged first. From a Bionian perspective the group was attacking Thomas' mother and she was doing her best to run away. At one level of engagement the group saw itself as organized, structured and managing its resources efficiently as it worked towards fulfilling its work objectives. It believed itself to be in contact with the reality within, around and outside of the group. It had direct links with wider society. But this belief does not take into account the pre-emptive power of basic assumption mentality.

Groups that meet where members are ignorant of basic assumption mentality believe themselves to be functioning logically, according to the dictates of reason. They believe themselves to be in touch with external reality. But the work group - indeed, any human group -

is a living entity beyond the sum of individual identities. This entity, Bion suggests, is moved by the powerful vectors of subconscious group dynamics, *baP*, *baD* and *baF*. It is galvanised by the search for a leader, for a *raison d'être*; and, of course, its individuals seek 'treatment' for ever-present neurosis. As Bion notes: "The more disturbed the group the more easily discernible are the primitive phantasies and mechanisms" (p.165). These mechanisms emerge from nowhere, are played out and sometimes managed, but not always so. Bion has suggested that, for the group absorbed by basic assumption mentality, conscious subscription to logic, reason and being in touch with external reality are precarious claims.

At any given moment and for no apparent reason the group operating under one basic assumption may switch to another, typically from *baF* to *baP* to *baD*. Strong pairing behaviour (*baP*) will suddenly emerge to combat *baF*. At such times the group naturally looks to the leader for guidance, for personal treatment and for the essential leadership skills to preserve the existence of the group. But no leader is safe in his role as the group inevitably mistrust his abilities. And unless the group actively disavows its leader it not only follows him (or her) but it also depends upon him (or her) (p.58). Maintaining the role of leader can a precarious task when basic assumption mentality emerges. The leader must occasionally fight off the more paranoid challenger for temporary or sometimes permanent leadership of the group (p.67). The psychologist in Thomas' story succeeded in temporarily usurping the headteacher by providing the group with a more common enemy to fight - no longer Thomas and his aggression but now an unnamed relative of the family's past who had inflicted such suffering on Thomas's mother, and indirectly on Thomas himself. The threatened leadership revolt was forestalled by the meeting being brought to an early end.

The specialised work group is a rather different entity. It is a specialised work group that 'buds off' from the working group. Its primary function is to neutralise *baF* behaviour in the group as it emerges and promote work group activity. To do this the specialist work group utilises the group penchant for *baD* and *baP* mentalities. For example, in educational, institutional or business groups that meet, emotions can rise to the surface at times. People generally keep themselves under control in these situations and 'bite their tongue', so to speak. But at any moment the behaviour of individuals can succumb to group pressure, such as when *baF*, *baP* or *baD* mentalities take over. The management team deal with this ever-present danger by forming a specialised work group, comprised of senior or chosen members. This specialist group has the job of dealing with the emergence of unexpected dynamics, for example a team member 'losing it' and going into a rant. It also has the job of managing the interface of public, policy and problem in respect of delivering group services to the public - the buck stops with them. As with other types of group, the specialised work group exists *not only* when it formally meets in a room to discuss issues that have arisen. The existence of the specialised work group transcends space and time. Flavours of specialised work group maneuvers are provided in the fictional account of a team meeting of professionals later in this chapter.

### **(iii) more esoteric features of group behaviour**

Other features of group behaviour, which might be considered to be more esoteric in nature, deserve mention. They bring with them fascinating insights into the behaviour of people who meet in groups in society, in schools, in family gatherings and at football matches, etc. I apply these features immediately to the plight of the excluded child and the story of Thomas.

***basic assumption mentality is driven by emotional need***

“All groups stimulate and at the same time frustrate the individuals composing them; for the individual is impelled to seek the satisfaction of his needs in his group and is at the same time inhibited in this aim by the primitive fears that the group arouses” (p.188).

The emotional effect of behaviour inspired by basic assumption mentality are powerful, which any person who has been part of a group, in which difficulties have emerged, will recognise. I am sure that my colleagues have such experiences not only in work but also in other groups. The benefits of immersing one's emotional self in the unconscious, powerful energy of the group are clear - one experiences a powerful sense of 'being alive'; one's contributions to the group are immediately understood and responded to by other members of the group; and one receives the 'therapy' that one needs, whatever that may be. Think of the exciting groups we choose to be part of - perhaps as football spectator or Ed Sheeran groupies or being the popular guest at *Abigail's Party*? Human beings are strongly attracted to groups. Being part of the family group provides an obvious example of this - if you are part of a 'happy family', of course. It is difficult, although possible, to *pretend* to be a part of a group and, from that position of pretence, observe the group, as Bion attempted. I tried this once in my role as educational psychologist. The benefit of attempting this type of disconnect is that one can really see what Bion is trying to communicate.

***basic assumption mentality can switch for no apparent reason***

According to Bion, any basic assumption that is currently operating in the group can change to another instantly or remain extant for the duration of the entire group encounter or endure for months or years – there are no rules of continuance, swapping or return. In any group the prevailing group mentality is the unconscious strategy of the group, designed to fulfil the purposes of the group, whether these purposes are clear or not. The group is in constant flux – it can neither remain in stasis and yet it resists development. The common group dynamics (*baD*, *baF*, *baP*) are powerful, unconscious and irresistible. The group – such as the fictional group that met to discuss Thomas – can maintain a working group mentality for the duration of the meeting or the group mentality can switch in an instant. The headteacher in Thomas' meeting clearly hoped for the enactment of work group activity from the outset. Thomas' mother did not. The psychologist recognised this quickly and helped people live with the impending uncertainty. This, I suggest, is an important skill for the educational psychologist when working in schools.

***the location and presence of the group members are not relevant***

An appreciation of this feature is vital in order to understand how the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school is enacted in England today despite its documented evils. The influence of the group on individuals in the group does not have to come from the visible group that is right there in the room at that point in time. It is entirely possible for an individual to be motivated by a group dynamic by virtue of his membership to a group that is not actually present around him. The suicide bomber provides a stark reminder of this. It is entirely possible that the headteacher and members of staff at Thomas' high school were 'keeping faith' with an unseen staff group when the words were spoken: "As a school, we are in a position where we

we do not believe that we can meet your son's needs". I would argue that the group that supposedly 'decided' that the additional support needed to help Thomas lay outside of mainstream school, i.e. those at the meeting that the educational psychologist attended, were not really the group that 'decided' at all. That was an entirely different group defined by its basic assumption mentality, *baF*. That group had an undisclosed location and a secret membership. It operated in a place and time where physical contiguity had little meaning. It just so happened that both 'decisions' conveniently coincided. Many times they do not. This, the reader will appreciate, is an interpretation based on a reading of Bion (*ibid*), not a fact. I add more to this later in this chapter.

***time is not a relevant feature in basic assumption mentality***

Time is not a factor in the group dynamics that Bion describes as operating in group situations. Thus when the group operates under a leadership-dependency basic assumption mentality (*baD*) it is instantly connected to other instances when the same basic assumption operated – it is not separate from these other instances, as Bion notes:

“The basic-assumption group does not disperse or meet, and references to time have no meaning in the basic-assumption group” (p.172).

In the fictitious example given, members of school staff adopted the basic assumption mentality of *baD* when they entered the room of the headteacher. They were conditioned so. Jaynes (1976), discussed in the next chapter, offers a different explanation for this behaviour.

The connection is one of meaning and energy relevant to the group that is functioning as a group. It is not a connection relevant to a particular time or place. There is no ‘timing’ as such, just the instantaneous expression of, in Thomas' story, a basic assumption mentality of



leadership dependency (*baD*), replacing pairing (*baP*), replacing fight/flight (*baF*). Arguably the psychologist in this story deliberately encouraged *baP* to support Thomas' mother. In this respect the quality of the basic assumption mentality suffusing a group where permanent exclusion is a possible outcome (*baF*) is the same in type as *baF* emerging in any other group meeting at other time and place. The basic assumption that dominated Thomas' meeting was *baF*. It had a power that transcended time and space – if one accepts Bion's vision of group behaviour. The basic assumption mentality *baF*, like *baP* and *baD*, has the portability and omnipresence of an electron - at least the sort of electron that Gribbin (2002) wrote about. *BaF* is, according to Bion, everywhere in society, not just *in* Thomas' meeting. It has the same, timeless vector that Pope Francis was referring to when he spoke about capital punishment and violence in the world:

“... contemporary societies over-use criminal punishment, partially out of a primitive tendency to offer up "sacrificial victims, accused of the disgraces that strike the community" (My source being Rocca, 2014).

#### **(iv) an application of Bion's work to the story of Thomas**

Any educational psychologist who has attend a meeting like Thomas' will know how emotionally draining it can be. Some of the group dynamics that Bion might have picked up on, had he cast his clinical eye on Thomas' meeting, might have included the following:

(i) The headteacher, silent after his opening gambit, presented as the strong, somewhat Messianic leader of the group. His initial role was to confirm that the group engage in work group activity, applying logic, reason and compassion in its deliberations to reach (the desired?) conclusion about what to do to help Thomas. Also, the headteacher sought to meet the needs

of individual group members, especially those that he spent every day with, i.e. members of his school staff. Occasionally he promoted a *baP* basic assumption mentality. But his ultimate objective was the enactment of *baF* - to rid the school of Thomas and all his associated problems. As an experienced practitioner the psychologist was sensitive to the unspoken objective, i.e. general agreement that Thomas needed to be educated 'elsewhere'.

(ii) Arguably *baF* dominated Thomas' meeting - especially at the beginning and end. This can be construed as acts of aggression towards Thomas. I am not saying that these would be unreasonable acts – I am simply providing a different interpretation of them. The ultimate punishment – permanent exclusion – was the unspoken possibility from the outset. There were many members of school staff present, i.e. a crowd of 'evidence givers'. The words used by them reflected a fight mentality. When Thomas' mother hung her head in submission this evidenced the flight part of *baF*. When *baF* mentality is so powerful it needs to be expressed – if it remains unspoken it can be too much to bear. If it is expressed too forcefully it cannot be tolerated. Many educational psychologists will have been in this situation. The psychologist recognised the nature of the people interactions. She facilitated the process of the meeting, the shift from individual, purposeful behaviour towards group-inspired behaviour informed by the materialisation of basic assumption mentalities.

(iii) In the meeting Thomas' mother was considerably disadvantaged by the events described. She had little power herself to wield. By attending the meeting she had tacitly agreed to sit as part of a working group meeting for a specific purpose. But her ascribed role was also to be the recipient of an attack, an expression of *baF* by the group, including those who did not speak. She was expected to show was the flight part of *baF*. Her body language was pained. She spoke

about events in the past as though they were located on a near horizon. Time, as Bion noted, had no meaning there, at least not for her. Because the psychologist gave her permission to speak and because she responded sensitively to what Thomas' mother said, the psychologist had, according to Bion, temporarily usurped the headteacher as leader of the group. A parallel explanation was that she engaged in pairing behaviour (*baP*) to challenge the *baF* basic assumption, which is uncomfortable for everyone to bear. Being either the usurper or the would-be pairing suitor, the psychologist's role was thus precarious, which made it necessary for her to suggest bringing the meeting to an early close.

What good, we might ask, do these deep, speculative, Bionesque interpretations serve when considering an event of school exclusion? The interpretations cannot be scientifically proven, firmly established and certainly not replicated in a laboratory. They cannot be communicated to the parent, people at school or senior figures in the local authority, at least not in the way presented here. Therefore what is their value? How can a psychologist use Bion's perspective on group behaviour to improve her practice, especially in a situation where permanent exclusion is possible? Forewarned is forearmed. In my work I have found that such interpretations have helped me to remain in touch with my own thoughts, perceptions and feelings as I enter what are sometimes unexpectedly stressful situations in school.

During professional training I was introduced to the analogy of 'helicopter skills', where an educational psychologist could be part of a meeting and simultaneously able to 'rise above' it to examine its elements of its contents and process. What I describe here is an ability, inspired by Bion, for the educational psychologist to not only 'rise above' the stressful meeting situation and view it from 'above' but to also recognize that what she sees before her is not a singular

reality located in an agreed space/time, available to every person present. Logic, reason, due process and a subscription to working group activity do not always prevail. Something dynamic, powerful, emotional and irresistible is out there. Bion's insights into group activity provide a sneak preview into a complex, human phenomenology that the familiar and traditional and epistemologies (i.e. those accepted 'ways of knowing') cannot offer. Things are far more complex than the two dimensional view from a helicopter.

**(v) an application of Bion's work to a group meeting of professionals**

Lessons from *Experiences in groups* take some time to digest. Bion feels that the phenomena he observed occur widely in society. Perhaps the human dynamics he described in the patient group also entrap the educational psychologist in the course of her daily work? We psychologists sometimes have a crucial role when permanent exclusion is a likelihood. But do we routinely become involved or do we avoid the situation? And when we are involved are we effective? Panayiotopoulos and Kerfoot (2007), reviewing school exclusion across different countries, conclude that, in order to effect change, greater interagency cooperation is required:

“.. it then becomes necessary to examine whether the problem of school/social exclusion can become part of an interagency agenda rather than remaining solely an educational problem” (p.75).

Accordingly some psychologists work at the management level trying to make improvements situated at the local authority level. In such work discussion meetings are familiar territory. Can such a discussion group provide material for Bion's insights? More than once I attempted to apply a Bionesque interpretation to team meeting discussions that took place in a local authority where I once worked. To achieve this I simply acted like a reflective but quiet team

member. But secretly I was observing the meeting and categorising what was said using Bion's ideas. I disguised myself as myself and became a spy of my own convenience.

For ethical reasons I cannot provide a verbatim report of any such meeting. The world of educational psychology in England is small and the psychologists who attended those meetings might identify (or misidentify) themselves or others. I have not sought any permission to represent my colleagues, past and present, in this way. To convey the subtle interactions that I have observed on more than one occasion in service team meetings, and to apply a Bionesque interpretation, I have embedded features of my experiences over time in one fictional story. Below I describe a group of psychiatrists who are meeting to discuss unusual patient behaviour in a psychiatric wing of a mental hospital. They do this at the time of observing patient behaviour from behind a two-way mirror. Psychiatry seems an appropriate choice of institution considering the overlap with Bion's own work and the intentional parallels to a team meeting of educational psychologist. I now list these intentional parallels.

***parallels between team meetings: psychiatrists and educational psychologists***

- the meeting of psychiatrists is broadly similar to the team meeting of educational psychologists in the general sense of professional occupation and client encounters;
- the subjects of discussion are comparable: in the psychiatric ward, the visual display of unusual patient behaviour; in the team meeting of educational psychologists, the sudden increase in the numbers of permanent exclusions reported in that local authority;
- the dialogue in the psychiatrists' meeting, reported below, is intentionally laced with the dynamics of the type that Bion describes and interprets;
- the characters chosen to speak can, with just a little effort, be mapped onto characters that

exist in psychiatry and educational psychology circles, indeed any large institution;  
- for 'overly-medicated' read 'permanently excluded'.

The background to this story is that a number of patients in a psychiatric ward have gathered together as a group in a room in the hospital to discuss the decision by senior doctors to withhold a new drug that might eradicate, overnight, neurotic symptoms. The patient who called the meeting acts as leader. One dynamic operating, but not yet clearly established, is the overthrow of this leader by a contender for the role. A stronger, more psychotic patient is looking for the opportunity to assert himself in the patient group. This is not unfamiliar territory, as Bion notes:

“In my experience most groups, not only the patient groups, find a substitute (leader) that satisfies them very well. It is usually a man or woman with marked paranoid trends; perhaps if the presence of an enemy is not immediately obvious to the group, the next best thing is for the group to choose a leader to whom it is” (p.67)

The overthrow of the leader is not fully established and other basic assumption activity mentalities prevail. From the point of view of anyone observing, the patients quickly resort to fighting one another, hurling insults, threatening one another, laughing at each other, not listening and shouting out accusation. Or else they are running away from one another as in the classic *baF* basic assumption activity. One or two patients are engaged in pairing activity.

In an adjacent room, connected by a two-way mirror, a senior psychiatrist and his group of junior psychiatrists and trainees have gathered together to observe and discuss the patient unrest that is occurring in the room next door. The psychiatrists are aware of discontent in the

patient group and the reason for it but the patients are not aware of the psychiatrists watching. The psychiatrists observe the impromptu meeting of patients unknown to them. The psychiatrists also air their thoughts about patient need and patient behaviour. The patient group quickly loses its focus. Their initial discussion gives way to increasing argument as the dynamics of a leadership battle (*baD*) and general fight/flight behaviour (*baF*) emerges. The psychiatrist group observe this behaviour closely. I see parallels between this story and the story of unnamed children at risk of exclusion being discussed by a team of educational psychologists. No doubt some would object to my fiction but I can find no other way of conveying my thoughts on the matter.

On the surface both groups – the patients and the psychiatrists - make objective statements, ask logical questions and engage in work group activity. At the unconscious group level, however, the conversation of both groups is dominated by the infusion of other basic assumption mentalities. A Bionesque interpretation applies to both the patient group and the psychiatrists' group. The discussion goes follows. The dialogue is intended to capture something relevant to group behaviour, something that is normally intangible. I leave it to the reader to decide whether the dialogue is relevant to a meeting of educational psychologists who are meeting to to discuss the sudden rise in permanent exclusions in the local authority. My feeling is that the overlap is significant and that the fiction applies more widely to team meetings in business, public services and government.

### ***the discussion that takes place at the meeting of professionals***

In this fictitious meeting Joe is a junior psychiatrist, asked by the senior psychiatrist to keep a close eye on the well being of the patients generally. Joe became aware of an impromptu

meeting of patients taking place and he alerted the senior psychiatrist, John. A number of psychiatrists and other workers come together to discuss the matter, as described. Sophie is a junior psychiatrist who feels strongly about patient rights. Leigh is another junior who tends to favour a systemic approach to all things medical. Matt is new to the hospital, still training, but highly qualified and he asks searching questions. The fictional dialogue below is interpreted in two ways. Firstly the objective (logical, rational, conscious) purpose of what is being said is stated. Secondly (and shown in italic) a Bionesque interpretation based on basic assumption mentalities, *baF*, *baP*, *baD* is applied. The latter occur unconsciously. Flavours of working group activity (WGA) and specialist work group activity (SWGA) are identified. The five types of group dynamic merge in and out of one another seamlessly, leaving whatever legacy of human emotion they do.

**Joe:** The situation is a complete mess. The situation is out of control. We need an urgent review. (*strategic comment, expressed view versus WGA and baF*)

**Sophie:** It depends what situation you mean. Look at the patients. Whereas Dianne is controlling herself quite well, Roger is showing strongly psychotic symptoms. I told him as much in therapy yesterday, for all the good it did. (*personal experience, expressed view versus WGA, baF*)

**John:** You did the best thing you could, Sophie. Don't blame yourself. (*expression of moral propriety versus baP*)

**Leigh:** But what is our role in all this? Surely, there are times when we simply should not get involved? Should not the orderlies deal with this? (*strategic comment, expressed view, question versus baF, baP*)



**Joe:** I got together recently with the other clinical leads and we discussed the overall situation in the wing in respect of medication. We agreed something had to change.

*(strategic comment and personal experience **versus** WGA, SWGA, baP)*

**Leigh:** There is the systemic element in this. Some wards do an awful lot of medicating and they are not held to account for this. There is no cross-accountability. *(expressed view, expression of moral propriety **versus** baF)*

**John:** There are more patients from less acute wards being strongly medicated this year than in acute wards. *(personal experience **versus** WGA)*

**Sophie:** Once a patient is medicated the patient is considerably disadvantaged. They are still part of a chaotic patient group but they cannot speak for themselves. Their situation is confusing, contradictory and impossible. *(expressed view, personal experience, expression of moral propriety **versus** WGA, baF)*

**Leigh:** We should approach the matter in terms of the patient's needs. *(strategic comment **versus** WGA)*

**Leigh:** Anyway, I thought we were not an overly-medicating ward – are we? *(question / baF)*

**Matt:** Do we still get £7,000 deducted from our budget when we have been found to improperly medicate? *(question / WGA)*

**Joe:** Yes. *(answer / WGA)*

**Leigh:** Where does that money go? If it went to ensuring that patients' needs were properly addressed then that would be the right thing. *(question, statement of moral propriety, strategic comment / WGA, baF)*

**Joe:** Three interested consultants and John and I are going to sit down together in the near future and pull together hospital guidance and NHS guidance and try to apply some sense and reason to all this. (*strategic comment, statement of logic versus WGA, SWGA, baD*)

**Matt:** Who is the person in this hospital with direct responsibility for resolving medication issues? (*question, strategic comment versus WGA*)

**Sophie:** And who is the person with direct responsibility for ensuring patients' views are heard? (*question, strategic comment versus WGA, baF*)

**Joe:** I think both responsibilities fall to Chloe Zen (a fictitious name). (*answer versus WGA*)

**Sophie:** Is that good enough? What about conflict of interests? (*question, question about moral propriety versus WGA, baF*)

**John:** Can I stop this discussion at this point? We will come back to the matter, which is important, at a future ward meeting. We will set aside some time to discuss it. Joe, get the orderlies to escort the patients back to the ward. (*strategic comment versus SWGA, baD*).

This form of dialogue might be observed in many modern clinical situations, in schools, in hospitals and in business meetings. I have attempted to reveal the fingerprint of obscure group dynamics of the type discussed by Bion (*ibid*). Typically, in such meetings, people move forward only very little towards reaching greater understanding of the matter - be it pathology, behaviour, health treatment or profit margins- under discussion. From Bion's perspective the group of psychiatrists engaged in shared time demonstrating their conscious subscription to working group activity. But this project was punctuated by the unconscious, intermittent and unpredictable emergence of basic group dynamics, *baF*, *baD* and *baP*. That any member of either group left the meeting feeling informed, educated or better prepared was a pleasant but

unprovable side effect. This is not necessarily a bad thing for as Bion notes: "... basic assumptions become dangerous in proportion as the attempt is made to translate them into action" (*ibid*, p.157). The danger was that the group or an individual in the group would make a decision on the basis of something that was unconscious, emotive, driven by primitive need and little understood. For example, someone might have decided to speak to the local press and 'reveal all'.

Why would I bother to write this story? I can think of three answers - personal therapy, an exploration of my doubts about *the expected ways* of looking at things; and a need to understand complex things in a simple way. For years before the moment when I sat and observed a meeting of educational psychologists discussing school exclusion I had found such gatherings disturbing for reasons that I could not articulate. I experienced doubt, confusion, frustration and annoyance. I knew something basic was going on but I did not know what. I felt like Bion observing his patients in the military wing of the hospital. Bion's interpretations illuminated my mind like someone turning on the light. They helped me understand things that were previously impossible to understand. They helped me manage my emotions and remain in control of my own behaviour. They helped me come to terms with the disconcerting fact that often the role of the educational psychologist is simply that of observance - because the situation is often too fraught to do anything about it. Bion's interpretations helped me classify disturbing, emotional effect so that I could think better in stressful situations.

**(vi) can Bion's insights help us understand school exclusion?**

It is apparent that Bion feels that society is struggling with a sickness, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests. It is probably fair to say that Freud ([1900] 1936) considered

that the expression of neurosis more prevalent in human behaviour than most people would care to think. Other writers have expressed similar sentiments, notably Fort (1919), Schopenhauer (1850) and Wells (1945) but from different perspectives. Beneath this large umbrella of what some see as a sick and disturbed society exist children, adults and a school educational system. Presumably the education system itself has a dimension that could be described as sick? For example, in a book the title of which includes the phrase 'benign violence' Allen (2014) subjects the purposes and effects of education to close scrutiny. From various sources the notion of an occasionally-disturbed society, with groups motivated by primitive instincts perpetrating violence on vulnerable groups emerges. One such violent event is permanent exclusion from school. I should pause to temper my onslaught. (Having sat in thousands of English classrooms I can faithfully report the opposite - a grand procession of healthy, lively person encounters - the therapy of quietly observing an ordinary classroom full of children whilst ostensibly observing the child with SEN has washed over me many times). But, beyond this, in English schools and local authorities the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school continues unabated. Its traces are only detectable via specialised information sources. Most exclusions are perhaps unavoidable but an unknown number are arguably not. There are many reasons to hold the matter to account. I wonder, can Bion's work help us understand other dynamics occurring in the sometimes-pernicious phenomenon of social exclusion? Below I attempt to answer this question.

In the phenomenon of excluding children from school the basic assumption operating is typically that of fight/flight, *baF*. The target child is seen as the enemy of the school and/or the enemy of the project of the school. When members of staff or officers from the local authority

meet (or do not actually meet!) to discuss a child they are, Bion's work suggests, acting as a group motivated by basic assumption mentality. I concede that most times they are not - often they are successfully functioning as a typical working group. In other cases, however, basic assumption mentality pervades and maximum 'fight' behaviour is visited upon a child when he is permanently excluded from the school. I know what the reader is thinking at this point: there is never such a meeting where permanent exclusion is decided by a group of adults who work in education. It is far more complicated than that. My point is that we tend to see things in discrete packages - either we are meeting or we are not, we are working well or we are not. There is never a time in our normal understanding of our behaviour that we are part of a metaphysical group that is not actually meeting as such but is motivated by basic assumption mentality.

According to Bion, the precise geographical location of the group expressing fight behaviour matters not and nor does whether the individual members who express *baF* see themselves as a group or not. What matters is the human energy, the human emotion and the unconscious basic assumption mentality operating in the group at that precise time. Basic assumption mentality does not have to be subjected to review with respect to external reality - in fact the group resists such accountability. Basic assumption mentality is an expression of group mind.

In deciding to permanently exclude a child, a nebulous group of local authority officers come together (i.e. adopt a shared mentality) to express the unconscious, emotionally-charged basic assumption mentality, *baF*. (There is an unavoidable overlap of terminology in relation to the nebulous group described here and the physical group (i.e. the AP panel) that meets to discuss

KS4 students destined for the AP route of education as described earlier in this thesis. This confusion is discussed by French and Simpson (2010, p.1861).

But this is no ordinary group, certainly not a group that meets regularly in the Civic Centre or Town Hall building at a specified time and for a specified purpose. Ordinarily this is not a group of individuals whose names are known or, indeed, who knows itself to be a group. This is a group that has materialized 'somewhere' but not 'right there'. This is a group of key people in the school and local authority who unconsciously combine in thought, communication and purpose to form a group with its own subtle criteria of membership, its own rules and its private predispositions to act and influence others. The group does not see itself as a group at all, even though it acts as a group. If the group clearly saw itself as a group, charged with such a dire responsibility, then it would be conscious of its own existence. It would then perhaps be recognised as a formally-appointed working group charged with the responsibility of managing children showing behaviour problems in schools. It would see itself evaluating evidence, making decisions, communicating those decisions, etc. It would measure its actions against a barometer of external reality. It would have to answer for its decisions - the good ones and the bad ones.

The group is either not conscious that it is acting as a group or, if has any self-awareness at all, it denies its own existence. Typically the group acts in accordance with the basic assumption mentality, *baF*. I am reminded here that Jung ([1934] 1968) discussed similar matters but I am unable to divert to discuss similarities or differences. The group acts emotively and irresistibly according to the dictates of *baF*, as described by Bion. The group 'come together' in spirit - it does not have to formally meet. This group of key school and local authority personnel decides

that 'enough is enough' and that exclusion is 'the right thing to do'. It is this nebulous, invisible group that decides to inflict on the vulnerable child the most-severe form of aggression – permanently excluding him from school.

I pause to reflect that the nebulous group excludes the child from his usual daily life experiences. It takes him away from what was previously 'his school', where his friends were, where his emotions in learning were once invested to somewhere rather different. What the excluded child learns from the experience is that people he barely knows can act aggressively towards him because they see him as 'the enemy'. This is a form of learning that is not on the intentional school curriculum but occurs with frightening regularity in thousands of English schools every year - more than 5,800 if we rely on government tables but somewhere between this figure and 116,000 according to my own dire estimates - and possibly more. This is the unrecognised social dynamic that drives permanent school exclusion. By extension this explanation applies equally to almost all other forms of social exclusion, social isolation and social punishment that occur in societies past, present and future.

The group that does the excluding sees no need to refer its actions to any agent of external reality. The group's existence is metaphysical. It emerges via a process of social accretion. This is a primitive group of otherwise-intelligent anthropoids energised by the most basic form of basic assumption mentality, *baF*. If its actions were exposed, the group would have to dissolve or drastically review its activity according to its proximity to reality. Presumably this intangible group of excluding adults gains satisfaction from acting together, gained from engaging closely with other group members in an unconscious, powerful, emotionally-charged group activity? It must be something like being one of the adoring fans at an Iron Maiden pop concert, perhaps

more subtly fulfilling. But I wonder what other reasons explain why individual people, who have not been invested with the specific role by the local authority, come together as a group to sanction actions that do not stand up to close scrutiny? To then disappear back into the local authority aether, unseen, unknown, unchallenged and having avoided any form of accountability? Can the behaviour of highly-educated teachers and local authority officers and educational psychologists really be as primitive and illogical as this?

Who comprises this invisible, all-powerful group of excluding adults? Do they know who they are and what they are doing? Can the messages of this chapter be brought to them? Are some of them leaders of the *baF* impulse and others simply followers? I am not suggesting that the educational psychologist opens up to discussion the conduct of the unconscious group activity that explains what is occurring in our schools precisely at the time when the act of permanent exclusion is made. After all, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the psychologist is often part of this excluding group. Such revelations would cause an inevitable backlash. Two of the many elements that might serve to trigger such a backlash are the relationship to time and the relationship to group development:

“Time plays no part in (basic-assumption mentality); it is a dimension of mental function that is not recognized; consequently all activities that require an awareness of time are imperfectly comprehended and tend to arouse feelings of persecution” (p.158. My works inserted in brackets to improve readability).

And:



“(There) is the absence of any process of development as part of basic assumption mentality; stimuli to development meet with a hostile response” (p.159. My insertion of the word to improve readability).

This intangible, unaccountable group of excluding adults does not learn from its experiences when being emotionally manipulated by primitive basic assumption mentalities. Whilst the individual is part of a group driven by a basic assumption mentality he might as well be dreaming in a waking state. The emotional suffusion is so intense that the individual cannot recall or assimilate his experiences. He cannot remember them, he cannot speak about them and he cannot learn from them. So important is this point that I need to break it down further. I will describe two epistemologies, two ways of knowing what we are about in our work when it touches on matters of social exclusion.

Firstly, the familiar and traditional ‘ways of knowing’ that permit the individual to understand their own behaviour in and out of the group has the following features: events in the world are time-oriented, they are logically predictable. Such events can be viewed and systematically (see list 1, this thesis, ch3iv). Physical and social laws apply. Words used as metaphors to explain thoughts are taken at face value and ‘meaning’ emerges in a shared and natural way. As to the series of events that might ensue, causal links apply. According to this epistemology the person is truly an individual defined by the boundaries of his skin. They think, reason and manage the delicate balance of expressing their desires and moral values whilst being aware of the pre-emptive needs of the group - sometimes the end must justify the means, etc. According to this epistemology the series of events in list 1 explains how one person - suppose it be a senior member of the school management team - arrived at *one moment in time* where *he and he*

*alone* decided to make a permanent exclusion. The same epistemology is used in research studies that more-often examine the school exclusion machine at its output end. They reveal the continuing illogic, unfairness and pernicious outcomes for an unknown number of children year on year. But the same epistemology cannot complete the circle. It cannot signpost necessary improvements that lead to visible improvements. All it can offer is the reason we, as professionals working in educational institutions, cannot stop excluding people is because we cannot stop doing it. But we do not know why. *We must be mad* - but the epistemology is OK!

The second 'way of knowing' of which Bion's work is an example of is very different. It bears more resemblance to psychotherapy than physics or the familiar social science described above. What is not in list 1 is the moment, the time, the place, the structure of the metaphysical group; and the energy of a group expressing the powerful basic assumption mentality of *baF*. Because, as noted, there does not need to be a time or a place and there certainly does not have to be the realisation that you, as an individual, are acting as part of a group driven by primitive motive. This epistemology completes the circle - it explains why we do not learn from our experiences. There are times in our work and in our lives when the second epistemology invades upon the first and overruns it. At one moment we are a qualified, duly-appointed educational psychologist behaving rationally according to the dictates of our scientific training, our learning and our logical selves. The next we act as an unconscious puppet, part of a group pervaded by a primitive basic assumption mentality. The second epistemology is not subservient to the first. In fact it is ignored by the first - from the familiar perspectives of social science it does not exist. Accordingly the epistemological position of almost all the researchers cited in chapter three what Bion published in 1961 was

psychobabble. Let me pause for a moment to consider the matter of authorisation, in particular who authorises a permanent exclusion from school?

According to the sequence of events described in list 1, there comes a point in time when a senior teacher of the school *decides for himself* to permanently exclude the child whose behaviour warrants it. He does this with regard to the continuing unacceptable situation that he has clear evidence of. He does this with due regard to local authority policies on the matter. He knows from recent conversations that most people understand and accept his deliberations and *his decision*. But, according to the second, more-esoteric epistemology, it is not *his* decision, even though he might think it is. His decision made that day, given material substance in the writing of the letter to the child's parent (and duly copied to the local authority), is located within a familiar and accepted epistemological framework. The real decision to exclude, which is the perpetration of a violent act, the enactment of *baF*, is authorised by the unseen, metaphysical group that is motivated by the basic assumption mentality of *baF*. This group exists in a timeless, spaceless, identity-less place. This metaphysical group cannot be identified. It is group behaving very similar to the patient groups Bion writes about. As such, the behaviour of the group is understood by a completely different epistemology. It is an event in human existence that has no reference to time, place, child identity, group member identity, local authority policies, accountability, fairness or justice. It operates as primitively as the selfish gene described by Dawkins (1976), struggling to survive in the primordial soup of millions of years ago. It is this metaphysical group that provides authorisation to exclude a child. The senior teacher simply believes that it was *his decision* alone. He remains unconscious of his membership of the nebulous group. He does not recognise his group membership at the

conscious level. In fact he would strenuously avoid doing so. Nobody wants proof that they sometimes act like a mindless puppet driven by a primitive group dynamic.

The existence of this parallel dimension, where two completely different epistemologies collide, explains why the familiar and traditional epistemology (which is typically any headteacher's or local authority officer's epistemological framework or else they would not keep their job) cannot bring proper accountability to the phenomenon of avoidable permanent exclusion from school. At the event level the decision to make a permanent exclusion was always necessarily the 'right thing' to do, justified by the enactment of the regrettable process shown in list 1. At the output end, at the national level, looking back in time, where statistics from thousands of excluded children from thousands schools are collated, permanent exclusion from school is often the 'wrong thing' to do. We need to be able to look at two epistemologies at once!

I ask that educational psychologists read *Experiences in groups* and engage in the mental activity of observing the phenomena of group meetings from a Bionesque perspective. Not all meetings are like the team meeting of psychiatrists described or Thomas' meeting in school. Most Headteachers and external support workers are far more experienced, caring and flexible than my fictional story suggests. But how do we improve matters in schools in relation to the avoidable exclusion of the most vulnerable children? We are thinking creatures. We are all open to persuasion. We can all learn. I suggest that the unconscious, invisible, powerful, nebulous group of excluding teachers and local authority officers should know itself. Somehow, in some way, we must bring self-consciousness to this group. They should know their own identity. They should know when and why they are stepping through the gates of an Ed Sheeran pop concert. They should learn to detect the unconscious, irresistible power of the

group. I now make a brief reflection about Bion's work in relation to society as a whole. If I have created 'a moment' for some I do not want to lose it.

According to what I have described above there is no difference, in terms of the expression of a primitive group mentality, between excluding a child from school than sending an adult to prison for a minor criminal offence or consigning a depressed woman to a mental institution or waging a violent, unjust war against another country on a pretext. These are all expressions of a group 'fighting' the individual or individuals who do not fit in. These are all examples of fighting the enemy because he is a threat to the group. The enemy is identified, categorised, excluded, imprisoned and eventually eliminated. There is no 'cold case analysis' to find out where things might have gone wrong. The meaning and energy associated with these acts of exclusion are explained by the fight/flight basic assumption operating in a group that probably does not see itself as a group. Certainly it is a group that does not refer its actions to any critical review. And hope, I suggest, is not on the horizon, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter implies.

#### **(vii) a critique of Bion's work**

After writing the above, I made a brief review of research that considers Bion's contributions. This review suggests to me that I have made a very personal application of Bion's work to the subject of school exclusion. Bion's work is not widely read. I included it in this thesis because it informs our understanding of human behaviour from a valuable, alternative perspective. It provides explanations for human behaviour more usually explored using familiar and traditional epistemologies. Karterud (1989) examines Bion's work from a psycho-analytical perspective. Studying 75 patient group situations - and using two observation schedules that fit the bill, 'familiar and traditional' - he explores the dynamics of groups operating under basic

assumption mentalities. One quote from Karterud (*ibid*), who quotes Bion (*ibid*), demonstrates how Karterud's paper falls beyond the focus of this present thesis:

"The basic assumptions were regarded as collective defence mechanisms resorted to in order to cope with the psychotic anxiety aroused in the group since 'the group approximates too closely, in the minds of the individuals composing it, the very primitive fantasies about the contents of the mother's body' " (Karterud pp. 316-317; quoting Bion, p.162).

French and Simpson (2010) attempt to build a bridge between Bion's description of basic assumption mentalities and work group activity. They do this because: "... Bion's work has never become an established part of mainstream social scientific approaches to the study of human relations in organisations and society" (p.1860). Clearly I would support their efforts but my difficulty with French and Simpson's paper is that it confuses what Bion was trying to do. Bion (*ibid*) was trying to describe something in human groups. The problem with attempting to 'translate' his work and 'improve' it is that the essence of Bion is lost.

I had less objection to the work of Pridham (1975) who attempted a direct application of Bion's work to the behaviour of groups that meet to solve problems in modern society. The fictional meeting about Thomas represents such a group. Pridham develops a theory of Acts of Turning in a group where basic assumption mentality provokes stress in the group members. In response to stress the group resorts to 'turning' by referring to group norms, traditions or accepted problem-solving routines. The methodology used by Pridham is more numerical and sophisticated than the methodology I have used in this thesis.

(viii) **summary of this chapter**

Bion's work is based on detailed observation made during lengthy group work encounters with patients located in a wing of a military hospital in Britain in the mid Twentieth Century. He informs his work using the interpretive tool of psycho-analysis. His project was to explore the links between his observations about patient behaviour in group situations and similar data derived from different groups, in particular non-patients meeting in other groups to pursue work group objectives, such as the family group and the group that meets in a local authority to discuss a troublesome pupil. Bion admits that these broader interpretations remain unproven. His purpose was to make predictions about future group behaviour based on current data provided by the patient group. He notes: "... one characteristic that differentiates the other groups is the tendency of (the usually neurotic) patient groups to act on basic assumptions basically" (p.10. The words in brackets were inserted by me to clarify meaning). Bion engaged in an elaborate social experiment. His data were the behaviours witnessed in groups where neurosis was a common symptom. He did this because the data exposed in clinic was immediate, powerful and repeated – he sought to learn from it and he wanted us to learn from it. He implies that basic assumption mentality pervades group interactions in society as a whole.

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is firstly describe Bion's work. I have then attempted to apply it directly to groups that meet to discuss children, in particular children at risk of permanent school exclusion from school. My application has been a *demonstration of meaning*, of how our group behaviour might be understood differently. It is not intended to be a proof or a refutation of other methodologies (such as offered by Pridham, 1975). My aim has

been to show fellow educational psychologists that complex, stressful meetings that we attend in schools can be interpreted in different ways for beneficial reasons.

I have sat in many meetings like Thomas's, bemused, observing unusual behaviour, hiding my confusion, self-monitoring my body language, sometimes quietly fuming at the direction the meeting was taking. Often I have suspected that hidden dynamics were at work but I could not quite understand what they were. I sensed the missing data, the pervading illogic, the dubious maneuvers, the strong, repeating patterns of what I thought was neurotic behaviour; and the all-too-predictable, frustrating outcomes. Strong emotion, as a manifest entity, would emerge in my internal mind-space. When I was new to the job I would occasionally express this emotion by saying something challenging. More often than not I would try to keep quiet. I was aware that there was something that I had to learn but I did not know what it was. I still find it difficult to describe what lies hidden there but I have made a start.

Bion offers a different way of looking at things. My experience is that by simply attempting to apply Bion's perspective whilst sitting in a school meeting or team meeting can help the educational psychologist grasp the complexity of what is going on - and remain sane in doing so. Bion's perspective will be new to many people. Adopting a Bionesque frame of reference it is like putting on a pair of spectacles that permits the psychologist, teacher or local authority officer to look at what is happening from a completely different perspective. The perspective has helped me move beyond accepted dogma. It has helped me hold on to uncertainty for that bit longer. It has helped me allocate the emotional experience of the sometimes challenging work. It has helped me become more available so that I can be of more help to my clients.



## chapter seven: the work of Jaynes

Jaynes (1976) reminds us that: “Plato refers to heroes who after death become the demons that tell people what to do” (p.164). Who tells us what to do as we go about our lives in this third millennium? Where do we get our authorisation to act from? In this chapter I examine the work of Julian Jaynes. His work does not stand, like Darwin's, in any hall of philosophical fame but is located down some corridor devoted to philosophy of a more esoteric flavour. But it is nevertheless a unique contribution to our understanding of human behaviour in society. Jaynes' insights are relevant to the phenomenon of school exclusion. They are similar to, but different in type from, the ideas of Bion (1961). I describe important aspects of Jaynes' work and make a brief critique of his contribution. This, no doubt, being one of the few 'outings' of Jaynes' work, I am not expecting the reader to *accept* Jaynes' hypotheses – I am asking the reader to *consider* them.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- (i) fictional story: Hamid
- (ii) the work of Jaynes
- (iii) a critique of Jaynes' work
- (iv) our bicameral origins
- (v) more feathers shed from the epistemological albatross
- (vi) summary of this chapter

**(i) fictional story: Hamid**

In this fictional story of a boy called Hamid the work of the educational psychologist was arguably successful. Later in this chapter I will challenge the use of the word 'successful'. Hamid was new to England having arrived with his family one year earlier than the events described here. He was a Key Stage 3 pupil but looked much older than his years. He was strong, intelligent and quick to learn. He learnt to speak, read and write in English rapidly. He had obvious academic ability. He was referred to the psychologist due to his unusual behaviour in school, particularly in relation to female students. It is not necessary to provide details about his 'unusual behaviour', except to say that Hamid said and did some inappropriate things in school, which were worrying to both his teachers and peers. His trajectory from being a newcomer and 'outsider', to 'a concern', to a child facing permanent exclusion was a steep one. Driving this were his behaviour choices and the intense, negative reactions of the group that he had joined.

On the day the educational psychologist visited school she had to pass through the school. No less than four members of staff, one being the deputy head of school, emerged from the architecture, one by one, to speak of their concerns about Hamid. It was impossible for the psychologist to attempt to write down what they said, so fast did the 'information' flow. Their strong words of professional concern were matched by equally-strong emotions. Hamid had, due to his behaviour, raised the utmost fight (*baF*) response in his peers and in member of school staff. The presentation of case concern was overwhelming. An early, pragmatic hypothesis of the psychologist was that Hamid was close to 'the end of the road' in that school.

What could an educational psychologist do in such a situation – except, possibly, avoid it? I repeat the words of Mercieca (2011): “The virtuous practitioner allows time for circumspection, understanding that the presentation of a difficulty does not necessitate an immediate solution, contrary to expectation” (p.126). Perhaps there was work to do? Having battled through the four members of staff she then met Hamid's parents in a private interview. They were naturally worried, ashamed, confused and unsure of who they could trust in the local authority - they too were new arrivals to England and this was their first contact with a school psychologist. They were vulnerable.

Later that same day the psychologist met Hamid. This proved to be one of the most fruitful routes of gathering information vital to future case resolution. They spoke together in a private room with a member of the school's pastoral staff observing. There was a detailed behaviour log. In order to make good contact with Hamid the psychologist used a specific tool to obtain his views. It became apparent that Hamid was receptive to discussion. He admitted key aspects of his conduct. He was naturally quiet about what emotions and motives lay behind his unusual behaviour. Experience told the psychologist that Hamid would have to move schools but not before one vital piece of work was carried out. She asked the SENCo to slow matters in school down. Hamid was placed on a partial timetable and spent his hours in school in a support room taught by a teaching assistant. The psychologist arranged to see Hamid in his family home with his mother and father present.

A week later the psychologist sat in the family home and discussed things. She began by discussing Hamid's obvious academic skills, his views and his aspirations for the future, which were like any other teenager's. Then the discussion turned to Hamid's behaviour in school.

Quite naturally Hamid did not want to talk about regretful things openly in the family home - he was, after all, their son. The psychologist said that it would help everyone if Hamid could talk about those things with his family present. A frank discussion then took place, at the end of which the psychologist said: "You must leave that high school. You must apply to go another high school. You must tell the new headteacher something about what has gone on and that it will never happen again. And it must never happen again". Hamid enrolled at another local high school. The educational psychologist made one, discrete telephone follow-up some months later and learnt that Hamid was "doing OK". From that briefest of follow-ups, the phrase 'successful' might be appended to her work. Or perhaps not? The matter of 'success' is discussed later.

## **(ii) the work of Jaynes**

In this thesis I return often to a familiar theme: the epistemological base and the methods of inquiry employed in social science, i.e. our ways of 'knowing' and our ways of 'finding out' and 'proving' something, fail to bring reason to the recurrence of pernicious acts of social exclusion. In particular, we educational psychologists, the services we work for and the local authorities that employs us, are unable to make changes to the problem of permanent exclusion from school. It is a situation that drastically needs review. For many years I have struggled to give this argument the clarity it deserves. I have found myself looking in unusual places for a stimulus, a model and a theory that would help me inspect the matter. After applying lesson from Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009), Dawkins (2007) and Bion (1961) I then found the work of Jaynes (1976). Jaynes provided me with a completely different set of theoretical and analytical tools

that helped me further explore the matter of permanent exclusion from school from yet another, alternative perspective. The work of Jaynes deserves to be considered.

Jaynes' treatise centers on the question of authorisation. Where, he asks, do we derive our authorisation from to decide anything as an individual, as a group or as a society? I would ask the reader: who gives *you* the authorisation to decide anything? Who gives *you* the authorisation to initiate an action? Who gives *you* the authorisation to make a decision about another person? "*I do,*" you would say. "*My authorisation stems from my role and responsibility in society - from who I am*". But this *I* and these modern forms of authorisation are, according to Jaynes, fairly new psychological constructions, steps in the evolution from a type of human who once lived in small groups to a human who lives in a population-saturated society. Jaynes' treatise is not mainstream. It spans the fields of anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, neuropsychology and psychotherapy in its attempt to explain aspects of human behaviour as witnessed in present day society but which derive from our anthropological past. It is an astounding piece of work, broad-reaching in the ground it covers. Jaynes lays the foundations of his various hypotheses on wide but tenuous footings.

I stumbled on Jaynes' work in Dawkins (*ibid*, p.392). Dawkins considered the notion that human being's belief in God is a sort of psychological pedomorphosis. Pedomorphosis is the retention into adulthood of a childhood characteristic. Dawkins argues that children have an innate propensity to believe in something or someone important, such as Father Christmas, the tooth fairy or God – the latter being whichever God their parents might choose for them (Dawkins, *ibid*, p.369). Dawkins also considers the opposite notion – that a belief in God came first, as an evolutionary phenomenon, and that other beliefs emerged later. They then slotted into a

receptive human psychology that had since evolved. (I am immediately reminded of a comparable etiology that applies to the present state of moral theory, as described by MacIntyre (2007), but cannot stray in that direction). What Dawkins considered was the psychological receptivity of the human brain to accept a divine 'observer', an ultimate, moral authority, a supreme being that is truly responsible for deciding all things human. From pursuing this line of inquiry Dawkins uncovered the work of Jaynes (*ibid*).

Describing Jaynes book as “.. complete rubbish or a work of consummate genius .. Probably the former ..” (p.392), Dawkins made me sit up and take notice. I located and read the book. It really loosened up my thoughts not just about school exclusion but about the many examples of habitual, irrational, institutional, punitive behaviour that we witness in our modern societies. Such things are of more concern when the punitive social behaviour is directed at vulnerable people, minority groups or a vilified section of society. It challenges fundamental ideas about the nature of the human race, of identity, of religion, of consciousness, of time, of history, of archaeology, of psychology and of self-determinate action. It questions the trajectory of modern science itself. In his own distinctive way, Jaynes challenges the familiar and traditional epistemologies that underpin modern psychology and social psychology.

I must insert two notes of caution about this chapter. I am belatedly aware that Jaynes' work can now be located in a relatively modern area of social inquiry. One of these is the relational (as opposed to individual) nature of being, such as discussed by Gergen (2009). I am unable to discuss overlap and comparison at this stage of writing. The second note is that Jaynes - in white, male, positivist tradition - refers unapologetically to 'man' and 'mankind' throughout.

Echoes of this no doubt occur in my words to follow. Wherever possible I changed 'man' to 'humankind', etc. but I found myself losing something of Jaynes' enthusiasm in doing so.

Jaynes was an academic who taught psychology at Princeton University, USA in the latter part of the Twentieth Century. He was involved in laboratory studies of brain function and complemented these studies with close reading of archaeological evidence and reading the Classics, including the works of Homer (Fagles, 1990). In particular he read and cited from *The Iliad* written between 1200 and 900 BC and *the Odyssey* written around 1000 and 800 BC. Jaynes' interests ranged far and wide. He was profoundly interested in the ancestral origins of mind and consciousness. He alighted upon a central proposition about the evolution of social human beings that would fundamentally challenge our understanding of the emergence of mind and human consciousness, which, according to Jaynes, are fairly recent events. Jaynes' central proposition is enshrined in the title of his book, *The origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind* (Jaynes, *ibid*).

In order to describe Jaynes' treatise I have simplified and schematised it. From Jaynes I identify three periods in our recent evolutionary past and, within each, three aspects of human experience that Jaynes considers. This schema is shown in table 2, below. I will begin by explaining the term 'bicameral'. I am assuming – because Jaynes does not explain it – that the origin of the term, *bicameral mind*, is *bi* meaning two (sides of the brain), *cameral* deriving from *kamara*, i.e. Latin for 'vault'; and *mind* referring to phenomena that occur 'inside' the brain. In a bicameral mind one side of the brain speaks to the other side, authorising it to take an action. According to Jaynes the bicameral mind existed in earlier, anthropological types of *homo sapiens sapiens*, from our ancient origins to around 3000 BC. At this point in history the size of

social group increased dramatically and the human mind adapted. Human being psychology began to change quite rapidly. The bicameral nature of mind began to break down, modify and Adapt to changing societal circumstances. One of Jayne's central points is that the legacies of our previously-bicameral mentality remain evident in the behaviour of people today - most people today possess a post-bicameral mind and its associated mentality. In some people, whom we call 'mentally ill', the bicameral functions of mind persist.



**table 2 the completeness of Jaynes' treatise**

	A: 3000 BC and before	B: 3000 BC to 1,000 AD	C: 1000 AD to present
1: The size of the societal group & its requirements of the individual	30%	60%	20%
2: The structure and function of the brain	40%	80%	30%
3: The seat of authorisation, i.e. who <i>decides</i> , and other, related psychological factors	50%	70%	40%

Adapt to changing societal circumstances. One of Jayne's central points is that the legacies of our previously-bicameral mentality remain evident in the behaviour of people today - most people today possess a post-bicameral mind and its associated mentality. In some people, whom we call 'mentally ill', the bicameral functions of mind persist.

***explanation of table 2***

Jaynes covers a lot of ground in his treatise and finds difficulty securing the quality of his arguments and hypotheses in terms of: (i) the amount of evidence he provides for each section above; and (ii) adjusting his arguments to fit with theories from other, contemporary sources. The percentages in table 2 refer to my own estimates of the completeness of Jaynes' arguments and they are necessarily crude estimates. My intention is to show which aspects of Jaynes' arguments are more fully argued and which are less so.

***A1 the size of the societal group 3000 BC and before***

By 3,000 BC and earlier *homo sapiens sapiens* lived in societies numbering less than a thousand individuals, with a few notable exceptions. Human tribes numbering thousands was an evolutionary step made possible by the demise of the Wurm glaciation and the consequential reduction of environmental threat, an evolutionary step made possible by the innate propensity in human beings to adapt to social living. Prior to that geological event *homo sapiens sapiens* lived in communities of a mere 30 or so (according to Jaynes, who cites Glynn, 1968). Mithin would argue for communities of 150 around this time (*ibid*, p.150). This early type of social man and woman required individuals to 'fit in' with the group and respond to social group controls without question. The basic assumption behaviour described by Bion (*ibid*) fits here.

### ***A2 the structure and function of the human brain 3000 BC and before***

Jaynes describes the mindset of bicameral man and woman of this period. Specific left brain regions – the Broca's and Wernicke's areas and the supplementary motor cortex – produced and responded to language in the social context. The situation described here is reversed for right-handed people. Jaynes cites the pioneering work of Penfield and Roberts (1959) to support his arguments. The brain, being symmetrical, possesses analogous right brain regions. In the bicameral mind neural activity in these right-brain regions produced the sensation of internal sounds, words, language, admonishments, reminders and directives; and bicameral people responded to these as though they were being 'spoken to', such that *they had to obey*. This is the essential description of the bicameral mind.

### ***A3 the seat of authorisation 3000 BC and before***

In bicameral man and bicameral woman authorisation for behaviour choice emanated from 'without' in the form of 'voices' that were perceived, which had their origins in right-brain language regions. These voice manifestations, according to Jaynes, were perceived by the individual as the voices of tribal leaders, the stewards of the Gods or of the actual Gods themselves. The voices provided the authorisation to work, obey and act. These voices obviate the need for the individual to 'think for himself' or to 'decide' anything of any significance. Indeed, such self-authorisation did not occur in bicameral mind. As noted, the voices were produced by the specific right-brain regions - neural mirrors of Broca's, Wernicke's and the supplementary motor cortex in the left brain. But they were perceived as emanating from 'without' - the gods, if you like, spoke and bicameral man and woman obeyed.

Jaynes provides anthropological and historical evidence to support this hypothesis. In particular he applies inspection of the works of Homer, or rather the stream of unknown Homeric *aoidos* who compiled the famous works, to demonstrate this bicameral mindset before and during the period when it began to break down. Homer's work occurred during the transition period between bicamerality and post-bicamerality. Bicameral humankind did not, according to Jaynes' hypothesis, possess consciousness or the heightened awareness of self that we feel that we experience today. He or she did not, for example, have the unique sense of identity that we feel we experience today. He or she did not possess implicit belief in his powers of self-agency or his power of self-volition or the gift of self-determination. According to Jaynes, bicameral societies ran like clockwork, like colonies of ants, bees and termites do. There was no dissent and no clash of personalities in a society that had no consciousness or individual personalities as such. Jaynes describes a society of robot-like, unquestioning, blindly-obedient beings that

stood on the threshold of what we now understand as consciousness. The condition of humankind prior to 3000 BC or thereabouts is described by Jaynes:

“If our reasonings have been correct, it is perfectly possible that there could have existed a race of men who spoke, judged, reasoned, solved problems, indeed did most of the things we do, but who were not conscious at all” (p.47).

Bicameral humans possessed most of the cognitive skills than modern humans currently possesses but our ancestors were devoid of the ability to self-authorise their own actions. They were not, as Jaynes argues we are today, illuminated with the self-obsession and the self-delusion and self-delusion of I.

### ***B1 the size of the societal group in the transition period between 3000 BC and 1000 AD***

Around about 3000 BC - but at different times in different places - human societies began to swell to number many thousands of individuals. They were immediately faced with problems stemming from a burgeoning population, social diversity, social stratification, social strain and the need for forms of social control. Social order was mediated by social roles, social pressure, the use of language and the evolution of a particular mindset. This transitional period was a difficult time for evolving humans. Jaynes provides historical and archeological evidence to captures the changing nature of human beings in society. His work necessarily challenges the work of other philosophers who have have assumed that human psychology before 3000 BC and through the transitional period was the same as it is today. Jaynes paid the price of his resounding challenge to the scientific community - his work remains largely ignored.

## ***B2 the structure and function of the human brain in the transition period between 3000 BC and 1000 AD***

Jaynes loosely invokes Darwinian theories of evolution to explain the breakdown of the bicameral mind and the emergence of 'mind' as we understand it today during the transition period. This evolutionary step, which, we are told, did not require *considerable* physiological improvements, occurred between 3000 BC and 1000 AD. Jaynes raises another hypothesis that would prove difficult to evidence: he feels (*ibid*, p.220) that, prior to this period, natural selection may have played a role in the rapid evolution of specific, mental *aptic structures* that were already present, ready to be activated if needed (p.31). These aptic structures presaged the emergence of human consciousness. This evolutionary step occurred simultaneous to the breaking down of the bicameral mind. Jaynes considers the notion that evolutionary change, possibly stimulated by rapidly-evolving societal development, led to the selective emergence of a new mentality, the human mentality that we accept today as normal. But the process of transition was not smooth. Jaynes cites archaeological and historical evidence that charts the social chaos of this transitional period (*ibid*, chapter four). He describes clashes between societies where bicamerality was retained and societies where bicamerality had been superseded. Inevitably the latter triumphed.

One such example was the demise of the Inca empire. The (bicameral) Inca empire perished in a matter of days at the hands of the post-bicameral, modern, Spanish invader, Pizarro: "The (Inca) king was divine, a descendant of the sun, the creator-god of land and earth, of people, of the sun's sweat (gold) and the moon's tears (silver)" (p.159). The Inca, imbued with bicameral minds, could not understand the motives, deceits and self-directed actions of the Spaniards

who appeared before them. Within a week the society numbering thousands of Inca succumbed to the treachery and brutality of an invading army of 150 Spanish soldiers.

### ***B3 the seat of authorisation during the transition period between 3000 BC and 1000 AD***

These transition years for the human race were marked by civil unrest on a global scale. It was a period in human history marked by social instability, insurrection, mass immigration, war and the destruction of primitive societies. Using evidence from anthropology, history and art, Jaynes traces the period of time through which, in different parts of the world, the bicameral mind broke down. As bicameral mind began to break down the voices that were once heard became silent. As authorisation from unseen voices failed so, too, did the very fabric of society around. Individuals who previously had no need for self-determinate thought and action floundered for purpose, reason and leadership. From a Darwinian perspective we can envisage two closely-allied species competing for the same habitat. This has echoes of a similar struggle, of how *homo sapiens sapiens* prevailed against Neanderthal man 100,000 years earlier in a land now called Europe (Mithin, *ibid*, p.23). In this protracted period of transition the usual controls, controls suitable for much-smaller, bicameral societies, began to break down. Voices once heard so easily were now heard only through oracles. In some societies only specifically-appointed people could 'hear the voice'. The general population received their commands 'second hand', so to speak. Modern religions emerged during these transitional years.

### ***C1 the size of the societal group from 1000 AD and to the present day***

Bicameral human beings perished but psychological traces of our bicameral origins can still be seen today. Some of these are discussed below. From 1000 AD to the present day the size of societal groups have grown exponentially. Cities of 20 million people are not uncommon in the

modern world. The idea of 'nation' - an arguably economically-inspired social construction but that argument that lies beyond the boundaries of this thesis - was born. Population growth, political activity and war provided geographical boundaries to the size of the differing societal groups - perhaps only temporarily so as some, like Malthus, (Peterson, 1998) predict.

## ***C2 the structure and function of the human brain from 1000 AD to the present***

At the inception of modern mind, and with it modern consciousness, bicameral societies perished. But a couple of thousand years is not a long time and bicameral echoes persist. As this type of human mentality slowly succumbs to extinction a new one is emerging. This is the type of mentality we take for granted today. Ontologically, we see ourselves as a finished product. Jaynes describes the explosion of consciousness in the post-bicameral era. He describes the growth of language, non-verbal communication, identity, a belief in pure thought; and a deep subscription to the personal valency of human beings in terms of their decisions, behaviour and free will. Other developments during this period of time include vastly improved language use through exponential use of metaphor (see later in this chapter), the language of mathematics, an appreciation of levels of intention in the behaviour other people, the ability to deceive and suspect deceit and manage deception, a sense of unique self, an appreciation of otherness, the facility of personal mind-space, an awareness of the arrow of time and, of course, our belief in human dominance - with God's help - over a previously-uncontrollable Nature. But on an evolutionary scale 1000 AD to the present day is a very small step. Old habits die hard and old ways of thinking persist. These residual elements are discussed later in this chapter, in particular observing, in the present time in society, the remnants of what Jaynes calls the general bicameral paradigm (this thesis, ch7iv).

### ***C3 the seat of authorisation from 1000 AD to the present day***

We arrive at the condition of human beings in the present. Many things are left unsorted. I can do no better than cite Jaynes (*ibid*):

“We (modern human beings) live in a buzzing cloud of whys and wherefores, the purposes and reasonings of our narratisations, the many-routed adventures of our analogue 'I's. And this constant spinning out of possibilities is precisely what is necessary to save us from behaviour of a too-impulsive sort. The analogue 'I' and the metaphor 'me' are always resting at the confluence of many collective cognitive imperatives. We know too much to command ourselves very far ” (*ibid*, p 402).

I return again to an important question: who provides the authorisation for our actions? The question of how we authorise our own actions is woven into Jaynes' entire text but only discussed in detail here and there throughout the book. Having challenged archaeology, linguistics and psychotherapy I suppose he chose not to challenge Hume (1739, 1740) and his contemporaries on matters of free will, rational decisions and personal agency. These omissions stalk Jaynes' work like shadows and they stalk this thesis also. Precisely who or what authorises our actions is a difficult subject to do any justice to.

We would all consider that the actions, behaviour and decisions of complex mammals, such as sheep and dogs, are primarily instinctive, reactive, adaptive and protective, etc. But humans, although mammals, seems to consider things in much more depth. They apply, supposedly, extended deliberation to the smallest matter before finally 'deciding'. Their powers of attention control are, indeed, remarkable. A human being, we now understand, has free will. It would be disconcerting to believe that almost everything the individual decided to do in his complex life



of multiple behavioural choices was based mainly on learned behaviours themselves predicated by primitive forces, unconsciously rehearsed a thousand times. Deep down inside each person believes that he gives to the minutiae of his life as much thought and decision as Michael Faraday applied to the details of his work on electromagnetic induction (Faraday, [1836-1839], 1936). Are we, I wonder, in awe of ourselves? Is what gives credence to our irrational and neurotic social behaviour simply the fact that we are all misguided together and it is socially taboo to question the prevalent logic of the modern human being?

According to Jaynes' hypothesis, in bicameral man's (Jaynes refers almost exclusively to 'man') authorisation for his decisions and behaviour choices came from what he perceived as an internal voice that commanded him. Modern humans must search his experience realm to find other sources, other voices of inspiration, other ways of 'deciding for himself'. Do we possess the ability to self-authorise or are we simply deluding ourselves? There are arguments that not all people have developed the level of self-authorisation that we think is the human norm. Consider, for example, the people who are 'ill' with the mental illness we call schizophrenia. Jaynes devotes a whole chapter to this subject (pp. 404-432). He considers schizophrenia not to be an illness as such but the re-awakening of 'aptic' structures of bicameral mentality (p.416). In positivist fashion, these aptic structures *are* the physiological location of bicameral mentality. Jaynes explores the relationships between hypnosis, hallucinations, belief in God and the dissolution of 'mind-space' in schizophrenia (p.420). He considers the immense journey humankind has covered in the space of five thousand years. In the space of an evolutionary second we have moved from small societies of hundreds, in some cases thousands, run by a bicameral mentality, to immense societies of millions in which every individual is 'free', 'free to

decide' and 'think for himself'. I use inverted commas to signal that the verisimilitude of the notions is in doubt. The argument that these 'wills' have been purloined by those pursuing economic gain lies beyond the scope of this thesis but the work of Foer (2017) deserves mention here. Foer describes the present time and our obsession with telephones, tablets and computers. These serve as hosts, conditioning agents, that have subverted our free will.

So do we really decide what we do or do we just do it anyway for unclear reasons? Or for no reason at all and then rationalise our decisions retrospectively? Or is most of it just habitual behaviour patterns dressed up to be several thousand discrete decisions per day? The matter is complex, with philosophical, religious and metaphysical dimensions as some philosophers have suggested (Nettleship and Nicholson, 1997). The motives that lie behind our obvious behaviour patterns and behaviour choices could be interpreted according to the theories of Bion (*ibid*), Freud (1900, 1936), Klein (1931, 1946), Kelly (1963) or according to the neo-Darwinist theories of operant conditioning behaviour modification regimes (Dreikurs, 1998; Skinner, 1953, 1971, 1981). With such a wide field of available theories, surely Jaynes' contribution is worthy of a second look?

The dilemmas raised by notions of authorisation permeate modern scientific inquiry. These cannot be given the depth of coverage they deserve in this thesis. Yet the issues of free will, self-determination and self-authorisation of our behaviour are central to the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school. I return to this issue below when I apply the collective cognitive imperative to the fictional story of Hamid. For the present I would simply ask some questions: who *decides* to permanently exclude a child from school? Is it just one person, perhaps the deputy head, who has had enough? Could there be other, more esoteric,

explanations different, even, from what Bion (*ibid*) suggested? Before I explore these matters further I need to make a brief critique of Jaynes' work.

### **(iii) a critique of Jaynes' work**

Jaynes wrote his book in 1976. I doubt that many have critiqued it in the light of modern anthropological, archaeological, psychological and neurological work. In particular Jaynes' hypotheses have not, I imagine, been subjected to critical review using recent advances in neuropsychology. Those tasks lie beyond the bounds of this thesis. As table 2 shows, Jaynes covers a lot of ground but he is unable to do a number of things: (i) he cannot devote enough coverage to the three ages of human anthropology that he identifies; (ii) he cannot devote enough coverage to the areas of philosophy that he opens up, e.g. neuropsychology, linguistics, psychology, archeology; (iii) he has not devoted enough coverage to the central issues of authorisation, self-determination and free will even though they are central to his work; and (iv) his work, because of its broad-reaching interests, is unlikely to be accepted by recognised writers in the various academic realms. Indeed, Jaynes argues that with the secularisation of modern scientific inquiry, science itself has become privatised (*ibid*, p.437). For example, Mithin (*ibid*) does not mention Jaynes even though their works cover very similar ground. I have made my own estimate of the completeness of Jaynes' arguments in table 2. I wonder will the reader of this thesis apply the same analysis - plus percentages - to my own arguments?

In writing the book in the way he did, Jaynes has sacrificed the participation and partnership of his contemporaries in order to preserve the cogency of his arguments. This is an obvious weakness but I suspect Jaynes himself would consider it a necessary compromise - he ventured into new, psychological territory. The consequences of even considering his central hypothesis

are huge. He considers psycho-analysis to be a prominent example of 'scientism' founded on vested interests (p.442). Presumably psycho-analysts would disagree? He notes that it is the human group that evolves (p.127) not the individual. Certainly traditional Darwinists would disagree. He damns archaeologists 'of all ranks of guilt' for removing artefacts from ancient tombs before attempting to find out what they were examining and the significance of what they found (p.188). Jaynes, one imagines, has few friends in the scientific community: "Science then, for all its pomp and factness, is not unlike some of the more easily disparaged outbreaks of pseudoreligions" (p.443). The quote that begins chapter five might be repeated here.

Crucially, Jaynes' hypotheses cannot be 'proved'. Fascinating as they are, they are simply 'interpretations' that rely on widespread sources of evidence. I do, however, draw from his treatise (and Bion's *Experiences in Groups*) that the condition of humans living in society is not yet a complete, finished product and the legacies of his earlier social condition may still be witnessed – or interpreted - in the behaviour of humankind in present day society. To these legacies I now turn, selecting four from a much larger array offered by Jaynes. It seems better to append to these descriptions lessons that we might apply to the matter of school exclusion.

#### **(iv) our bicameral origins**

##### ***idols, omens, sortilege and augury***

In ancient times human psychology was different than it is now. Jaynes describes the mentality then as characterised by a bicameral mind. Of particular note, ancestral humans were not self-authorised - he drew his authorisation from the sentient voices that he heard. His behaviour was dictated by the voices of his Gods. Following the breakdown of bicameral mind humans needed to find new forms of authorisation for their actions. The voices of the Gods needed to

be apprehended in different ways. Jaynes describes four forms of divination, an early one being the use of idols. Once the disembodied voices of the Gods had fallen silent (as they are silent now for most people) then standing beneath an idol (hence the metaphor, 'under-standing'), provided a locus, a focus and a perceptual inspiration to 'hear' what was left to be said. Sometimes idols were positioned beside waterfalls, such as the Oracle at Delphi (p.321), a location that facilitated the perception of 'utterances'. The sound of the babbling brook was perceived as a 'voice' by the willing listener. Physical idols remain a legacy bequeathed to modern society, not only in our museums but also in our churches, the Houses of Parliament, our schools and homes.

Another residual form of authorisation was (and still is!) provided by omens, such as the significance of the once-in-a-lifetime appearance of Halley's comet. Omens continue to serve as inspirations for authorisation in many modern societies (p.239) and Jaynes suggests that our reliance upon them traces back as a residual echo to our bicameral past. Dream omens still remain a major source of divination and authority in our lives today, Jaynes suggests. Freud ([1900] 1976) would no doubt prefer other explanations for the part that dreams play. Bion (1962) sees rather different functions served by dreaming, sleeping and in the processing of emotional experience (p.7).

One step up from omens comes sortilege, the origin of which lies in the casting of lots intended to provoke a response from the then-silent Gods. Sortilege remains unnaturally popular today considering, for example, the exceptionally low chance of anyone ever winning the national lottery. Next up comes augury, which involves the creation of meaning from observations and interpretations of a complex physical event. Jaynes provides examples of these, including

modern-day 'tea-leaf readers' and 'palm readers', both of whom continue to make a good living from these dubious claims to authorisation. Even the FA Cup Final begins with the tossing of a coin. Next comes extispicy. Post-bicameral humans and Middle Age humans engaged, as people today still engage, in extispicy. One historical form involved the examination of entrails of a sacrificed animal to see what messages God or Destiny placed therein. Jaynes argues that extispicy persists in modern society as a legacy of our bicameral origins. Does it, I wonder? In the next paragraph I provide an example of this.

Here I provide a provocative example of sortilege (sortilege at best, extispicy at worst) from my own work. Like many colleagues I have sat on panels convened to discuss the future educational arrangements for 'disaffected/troublesome' pupils in high schools. This activity often left me feeling uncomfortable, not least because of the paucity of the arguments given - arguments tainted by unattributable emotion, metaphor-laden assertion and manifest illogic. One venue for sortilege was the AP system that I discussed in chapter two. That panel of experts met at regular intervals to discuss the future school trajectories of students referred by high schools where staff felt unable to meet the students' behavioural needs. Sometimes the AP placement chosen for the 'disruptive' student was not determined by the criteria of 'best fit' between the student's needs and the AP college offer. Sometimes the decision seemed to be based on something not clearly explicated. Was our decision based on sortilege? Were we who sat on the panel simply looking for authorisation to act in the briefest detail of the briefest student case history? I could give an example but I dare not. Perhaps I am being too unjust? Perhaps I am being too kind? Presumably a Chi-square test could be run to compare the predictive power of decision-making based on logical, objective client information versus

sortilege in relation to the direction of future outcome indicators students? Presumably that is why we who sat on the AP panel did not collect future outcome indicators?

But what if extispicy was the source of our authorisation to remove a student from his school to an out-of-mainstream educational placement? Admittedly, we on the panel did not dismember the child whose case was being discussed - although, in passing, I reflect that, as an educational psychologist, I have often interpreted a behaviour log in a similar way. We on the panel *did* discuss the student and we *did* represented him; and we *did* decide for him. No, we did not remove and examine his insides to discover which AP setting to send him to - but how exactly did we decide? What was our decision based on? My recollection is that sometimes the evidence we read was very thinly collated, as reported earlier (this thesis, ch4vi). Am I still being too kind to those panel members of the past and myself? Is it possible that, in making such life-changing decisions on behalf of a vulnerable child, the panel was moved by obscure, non-scientific forms of divination and blind maneuvers of authority-seeking? On behalf of the silent majority of AP students past and present, and all children avoidably excluded from school, I ask: are the deliberation of such panels a convenient form of primitive sortilege and blind decision-making designed to manage the students' efficient removal from mainstream school?

If school exclusion, in each and every case, makes perfect sense then presumably someone adequately addresses: (i) the justification question - how, why and when should such permanent exclusion or its variants be decided upon? (ii) the moderation question - what checks, balances, counter-measures and forms of accountability are in place to obviate the injustices, problems and deficiencies that occur? And (iii) the social justice question - how do we know whether or not we have unjustly interfered with a student's education and his work

and economic future pathway? Presumably if the answers to the question are weak then the argument that things as primitive as sortilege and extispicy are implicated is strong?

### ***language and metaphor***

Many processes and procedures related to human interaction, including acts of permanent school exclusion, are mediated using spoken language and the medium of writing. I deal here only with language and from the perspective Jaynes (*ibid*) applies. Jaynes describes all language as elaboration of speech based on the generative use of metaphor: "... metaphor ... is the very constitutive ground of language .." (p.48). "It is by metaphor that language grows" (p.49). The function of metaphor, we are told, is the generation of new language as it is needed (p.49). Language itself is seen as not only as a means of communication but as an organ of perception (p.50). Jaynes extends the concept of metaphor to include four other associated terms. These terms explain the intentional elaboration and generation of future language. Below I provide a brief example not directly relevant to the subject of this thesis but it makes the point.

In late 2016 the 'Brexit' fiasco in Britain took a legalistic turn (BBC News on 4 November 2016). Like school exclusion, the issue was and remains emotive. It sticks in our minds, not least because it has been on the news almost every day since. When a member of the Yay! or Nay! group appeared on the TV to discuss the issue their language was often saturated with rampant metaphor generation and subscription to a meaningless memplex. The more meaningless the language was ("Brexit means Brexit!") the more emotion and facial distortion was applied by the speaker. Politicians manufactured exaggerated facial expressions like characters from a Shakespearean play. Sometimes the step from a convenient metaphor to a meaningless meme



was followed by the step to an unadulterated memplex. The memplex is just one face of the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school (see list 3, this thesis, ch5v).

### ***the general bicameral paradigm***

Jaynes argues that vestiges of our bicameral past are evident in our society and in our psychological disposition even today. Evolution moves slowly and, as Jaynes noted (*ibid*, p.436), five millennia is not a long time in terms on the evolutionary scale. Morphological features no doubt take much longer to fully evolve. Physical and neurological change of the brain may not be possible in such a short period of time. To deal with this difficulty, Jaynes describes what he calls 'aptic structures' in the brain, which permit more-rapid evolution of psychological features. Jaynes avoids using the term 'instincts'. He also avoids providing any evidence for the existence of aptic structures. An aptic structure refers to a neurological change resulting from a propensity of the organism to be 'apt' to behave in a certain way under a certain stimulus (p.31). For Jaynes, vestiges of our bicameral origins remain encoded in our aptic structures - and for some people much more than others. Jaynes postulates a latent bicameral paradigm witnessed today as the expression of a latent vestige of a more-primitive social psychology.

The paradigm has four overlapping phases, more fully described in Jaynes (*ibid*, p.324). These phases 'draw the person in' and make him or her receptive to the unspoken words of the group leader, Messianic leader or God. The parallel with deepening stages of hypnosis is intentional.

The paradigm explains how the individual receives external authorisation in society to act:

- (i) the collective cognitive imperative or culturally agreed belief system;
- (ii) the induction, which is the formal phase of ritualised engagement;
- (iii) the trance, which is the lessening of consciousness, the loss of *I*, resulting in a propensity

to obey the words or dictates of the disembodied voice;

- (iv) the archaic authorisation, the possession, if you like, at which point the individual relinquishes self-authorisation and obeys the directives of the God, oracle or spiritual leader. Such a leader may be either present or be the absent, perhaps even the dead, the Messianic leader, the long-gone Big Other, whose counsel is blindly followed.

At this point I return briefly to the fictional story of Hamid. In this story, which will be representative of similar stories from other psychologists, the educational psychologist was the person who succumbed to a general bicameral paradigm albeit unknowingly so - at least from Jaynes' perspective. The educational psychologist believed herself to have free will, important knowledge, accepted tools of inquiry and the ability to decide for herself. But she was deluded. Entering Hamid's high school that portentous day, she was quickly captured by the collective cognitive imperative that prevailed. The psychologist was operating within a culturally agreed belief system tethered by her long service at the high school and the regular application of a Service Level Agreement between the educational psychology service and the school. Accordingly, she approached the case with a propensity to behave and act in ways that she was supposed to. As she arrived in school she was already susceptible to the collective cognitive imperative. The first phase of her eventual possession was her unconscious subscription to the parameters of her occupational role.

The induction, then followed. This was the formal, ritualized procedure described earlier in this chapter - an intense, saturated and severe presentation by four members of staff of Hamid's 'unusual behavioural difficulties'. When the deputy head expressed "deep concern" the

psychologist mirrored due concern. When the head of year next revealed the behaviour log the psychologist read it and nodded solemnly.

The third phase was the inculcation of the trance, the lessening of consciousness in the psychologist, the loss of *I*, resulting in a propensity to obey the words of a disembodied voice. The words of the disembodied voice were arguably the first words spoken by the deputy head that day. But they could just as easily have been the disembodied voices of a long-gone Messianic leader. If I had been that educational psychologist such inspirations might have come from Firth (1993, 1995a, 1995b), Hoghughi (1973) or Yoeli (2009) but the fictional psychologist in Hamid's story had her own Messianic influences. The trance descended on the psychologist silently, pervasively and effectively. She thus became the unconscious agent of *the Oracle of Exclusion*, the senior management team of the school or a long-gone, Messianic leader.

Inspired by whichever source, the psychologist was now a blindly-obedient apostle to the exclusion creed - she had entered the final phase, she was possessed. Later, when she 'decided' to pay the family a home visit and say those fateful words to the vulnerable child: "You must leave that high school. You must apply to another high school .." she believed that she had *decided for herself* to engage in this activity. She believed that she was duly authorised to 'play God' with Hamid's future. In fact, from Jaynes' perspective, she was possessed and her decisions and actions were more or less decided for her by others. That she remained unconscious to the influence of the general bicameral paradigm is testimony to the power of this ancient force.

I am now able to apply Jaynes' hypothesis retrospectively to my own work as a consultant to an AP system for KS4 students. It will be recalled that approximately 100 students per year agreed or were strongly persuaded to leave mainstream high school to be educated in specialist AP colleges. A review allows me to hold in metaphorical mind-space two perspectives simultaneously and compare them. The first perspective is that the AP system was (and no doubts still is) a necessary resource, which is why many local authorities continue to operate them. Indeed, one government review finds them satisfactory to say the least (Department for Education, 2013). According to the underlying epistemology discussed earlier, such units are practical, necessary and justly offered to *the right students* who need them. The processes and procedures of such resources are almost always properly applied and rigorously accountable. One quote from the aforementioned review (DoE, *ibid*) could be described as ensuring that the exclusion machine was kept nice and shiny:

“A more general issue that emerged was concern about the availability of sufficient, local, flexible, high quality (Alternative Provisions) to meet the needs of students, particularly KS3 and KS2” (p.2; The words in brackets were inserted by me to clarify the type of educational provision referred to).

From an alternative perspective belief in the fairness of the AP system is a fictional necessity. The system serves the purposes of high schools far more than it serves the purposes of all the students referred to it. Viewed from the 'output' end of this particular school exclusion machine, the AP system is a convenient means that justifies a desired end. Its modest successes are grandly portrayed whilst its actual existence and debateable success is concealed from the general public. As described earlier, the way in which students were persuaded to leave

mainstream high school to join an AP system (this thesis, ch2iii) was subtle, secretive and unaccountable. The AP system could not be held to account for any mistakes, such as in regard of the 'false positives', i.e. those students who were inappropriately excluded from school and might have fared better remaining there. From an alternative perspective the processes and procedures of the AP panel were applied, not scientifically, but in compliance with an ancient form of little-understood divination. Those who sat on the panels that met at regular intervals to authorise a drastic change of trajectory in a child's educational journey were sometimes moved by reason, logic and refined moral precepts but sometimes moved by an ancient, general bicameral paradigm. The reader is invited to choose according to their preference.

Could any of this be true? Can we really give credence to an archaic form of authorisation? If so how can we make use of it? My answer is for the psychologist to tentatively consider the possibility of Jaynes' explanation to expand her metaphorical mindspace. By this I mean permit the thought to materialise in the context of that stressful meeting in school. Give it some mental space. Consider it for a moment. Does it explain what is occurring?

### ***metaphorical me in metaphorical mind-space***

Revealing himself to be a positivist and reductionist Jaynes describes any internal, neurologically-governed mental activity as an analogue, with a physiological base, of the world around. Jaynes describes mental activity as neural excitation and leaves the matter there. Humans are learning, reactive creatures. Our behaviour is physical, chemical or neurological in nature and our thoughts are just another form of our behaviour. Jaynes dismisses outright psychological concepts such as *I*, *me*, *mind* and *thought*. All of these are considered to be metaphorical and analogical representations of the world in its entirety, including the inner

world, the *psyche*. In the bicameral mind of 3,000 BC and earlier there was no metaphorical *me* and no metaphorical mind-space. There was no analogue *I* in the sense of pure thought emanating in a unique, personal identity informed by sequential experiences mapped onto a unique genetic code. For Jaynes, metaphorical *me* in metaphorical mind-space, which is inhabited by analogue *I*, emerged as bicameral humans gave way to post-bicameral humans. Metaphorical *me* is an illusion, an artefact in the recent development of receptive optic structures in the human brain. For Jaynes, our modern *mind* is simply an illusion.

The entity of metaphorical *me* is just one of many entities that the psychologist must recognise in the course of her work. In Thomas' story the psychologist gained some control over the metaphorical entities of herself and others and was able to work effectively. This was not a familiar and traditional 'way of knowing' or way of seeing things. Indeed, this is a difficult subject to write about. The lesson seems to be that if we, as psychologists, can create within ourselves a metaphorical mind-space and recognise within this entities that we know as as *confused me* or *struggling they* we can become more aware of, and able to deal with, the hidden dynamics of the complex, archaic, human situation that we may find ourselves in. We can resist the pull of the general bicameral paradigm that Jaynes (*ibid*) describes. We can recognise and so resist the powerful group dynamics that Bion (*ibid*) and Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009) have written about. There is value in the notion of metaphorical mind-space, especially as it provides a visual map upon which can be located the data of human experiences in situations where the permanent exclusion of a child from school is a distinct possibility.

**(v) more feathers shed from the epistemological albatross**

Jaynes applies the hypothesis of the bicameral mind, its partial breakdown in recent millennia and its continued expression in modern day society to the project of an evolving science. Here I consider four periods in our human social evolution, beginning with 3000 BC and prior to that period; then around 700 BC; then towards the end of the first millennium AD; and finally the beginning of the third millennium AD. Using these as staging posts in human's (hopefully) evolving social brain I examine the project of an evolving science.

Around 3000 BC and prior to that time human's mentality was governed by his bicameral mind. At this time there was no science, no writing, no singular person identities and no self-authorisation. Societies functioned like 'clockwork' in the way Jaynes describes them (this thesis, ch7ii); and the project of science lay incipient. The human being's role was to obey the voice of the leader, his (most leaders being male) God-steward or his God. The role of bicameral person was not to inquire, question or decide. Around 700 BC the process of the breakdown of the bicameral mind was underway. Other forms of divination emerged as an alternative to blind obedience to an unseen voice, including idolatry, extispicy and writing. The cuneiform tablet letters of Assyria (p.247) from that time reference their recipient readers (thus suggesting the emergence of the phenomenon of identity as a metaphorical construct) and are not just bland authorisations. They reference a future time (suggesting the spatialisation of time); and they have embedded within them the texture of deceit, suggesting that individual people's purposes might be different. Human being's place in his social world was changing fast and so was social mind. Science in this second period of recent human development amounts to basic acts of natural inquiry, observation and basic experimentation with few means of communicating findings widely to society at large. What we might describe today as rudimentary 'scientific'

forms of inquiry were at that time laced with strong flavours of idolatry, sortilege and extispicy. As previously noted, perhaps they still are sometimes, in some places?

By about 1000 AD the bicameral mind had broken down almost completely in most parts of the human world. Consciousness, as a new metaphysical entity, had emerged, immediately confronting a major obstacle. It had to compete with the metaphorical entity of *God*. Writings from this period abound suggesting that the words of the Gods, now silent in sound, lived on in writing. These words, once collated by the *aoidos* of unknown authors, were and remain sacrosanct to their believers even to this day. Religious texts, such as the Old Testament and the Quran, provide the rules for living and for making those most-difficult authorisations in our daily lives. Jaynes argues that the remnants of our bicameral origins survive in these authoritative texts. It was during this period that modern science emerged and was immediately constrained by the need to match scientific discovery with divine purpose. This tension between Science and God is represented, prior to the Age of Enlightenment, in all philosophical writings. After the Age of Enlightenment human beings became more able to separate the two belief realms, one outcome of this being that the voices of the Gods began to lose their authority. In this respect Darwin was successful. Today we find ourselves born into an age where billions of people believe in an immanent God and billions do not. We deal with this by not talking about it.

The history of science records the steps. Galileo was released from prison because he 'recanted' ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo\\_Galilei#Controversy\\_over\\_heliocentrism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_Galilei#Controversy_over_heliocentrism) sourced on 7 November 2016). A crucial cornerstone in the advancement of modern science occurs in Germany (Jaynes, *ibid*, p.437). One of those pioneers of modern science, Helmholtz (1853,



1854, 1862), applied mathematical treatment to the forces of energy and its conservation.

There were no spiritual concessions whatsoever in this treatise. Closely allied came the works of Darwin where “Cold *Uncalculating* Chance .. carved this human species out of matter” (Jaynes, *ibid*, p.438).

We arrive now at the early part of the third millennium AD. Scientific progress has become rapid. Jaynes (*ibid*) notes:

“Technology is a second and even more sustaining source of the scientific ritual, carrying its scientific basis forward on its own increasing and uncontrollable momentum through history” (p.434).

Despite the advancements in science modern humans retain vestiges of their bicameral past - or so Jaynes suggests. These vestiges are more commonly seen in expressions of the general bicameral paradigm as described above. But these vestiges infect modern science also. In this New Future, modern humankind believes itself to be 'free' and 'unique', each person possessing a never-to-be-repeated genetic code. Each person is 'an independent thinker' and in some ways 'divine' himself. I have argued that he is susceptible to anthropomorphic hyperbole (this thesis, ch4v). According to this rich set of beliefs any one of us could conceivably become the next Prime Minister or a finalist in the X Factor. Modern humans are 'intelligent', 'rational', 'logical' and, if not morally innocent, then at least morally 'doing the best they can given the circumstances'. Modern humans push forward the frontiers of science remorselessly, secure in their God-given dispositions, convinced of their ever-growing collection of scientific skills, confident in their future. Yet modern humans remain completely ignorant of their own theological prejudices and the shortfalls of modern science.

If science has triumphed, has it triumphed for everybody? Has it eradicated malaria? Are the elephants happy? Modern humans are blind to their ancestral past and blind to the influence of the not-so-silent forms of archaic authorisation in the present. Bion (*ibid*) would add that modern humans are unaware of their susceptibility to basic assumption mentalities. Now, with the collapse of our ancient, bicameral crutches, with the silencing of the Gods and the loss of divination we find ourselves in a vacuum blackened by the loss of God and blinded by the inadequacy of modern science. Mankind, Jaynes argues, has inevitably turned to smaller cults of institutionalised possession, not least in the realms of science. A quote from Gergen (*ibid*) fits here: "To appreciate the works of these philosophers one must crawl inside a highly complex and exotic world of words" (p.xxii). On a note central to this thesis I would add that our blind subscription to familiar and traditional forms of scientific inquiry represent an example of the vacuum that Jaynes alludes to; and an example of the 'world of words' that Gergen refers to.

This is what Jaynes means by the auguries of science. We feel that we have escaped from the clutches of an unseen, all-powerful, almighty, sometimes savage God only to find ourselves recreating a new God-in-Science. Jaynes describes the resulting 'scientisms' that accrue, such as the corruption of reasoned inquiry by personal need or political preference, the adoption of quasi-religious gestures into scientific method - such as unquestioning subscription to the tools of factor analysis, discriminant analysis or QSort - and the clustering together of families of ideas (Jaynes, *ibid*, p.441). These families merge into creeds of belief and give rise to scientific mythology. It is at this point that the reader will appreciate why Jaynes did not devote much effort to securing the agreement of his contemporaries and the benefits of peer review before submitting his work to publication. They would have demanded his silence.

There are rewards for the obedient. In return for choosing a convenient path, the new Disciple of Science receives what early forms of religion received in exchange for compliance – a way of seeing the world, a place in the hierarchy of humankind; and clarity about what to think, do and say - which metaphors to choose and which to discard - in short, a total explanation of humankind and the world we live in. In this New World, in this new way of seeing, 'everything that is not explained is not in view' (p.441). These are Jaynes' concerns about the direction of modern science. His vital criticisms explain his divorce from his academic peers. He has revealed himself to be an 'outsider' to the scientific community and has therefore been effectively excluded from it.

#### **(vi) summary of this chapter**

Any acceptance of Jaynes' hypothesis requires a considerable paradigm shift. There is curious relationship that I cannot make clear between the nature of contemporary social science, the matter of social injustice, the work of the educational psychologist and how we think, feel and speak about children. Jaynes' work appealed to me because it explained things that other theories could not and, for some reason, it also gave me peace of mind in what was sometimes an unpeaceful type of work. Bion's work had the same effect (Bion, *ibid*). And peace of mind is not to be underestimated as a desirable mental state if one is to remain the reflective, responsive practitioner of social science.

In this chapter I told a story about a fictional boy called Hamid and applied the work of Jaynes to understanding the predicament of the child, the psychologist and the others involved. In this story the psychologist was a calm, deciding professional, effective in her work. But from a

different point of view she was more of a puppet manipulated by unseen, archaic forces. The character, Hamid, raised ancient, archaic forces in the context of a modern, high-achieving school. His behaviour resulted in a massive social reaction of the school community. The response of people at school can be interpreted as an archaic response to the threat raised by an 'outsider' encroaching upon a closed social group. Hamid succeeded in raising in the minds and behaviour of staff, pupils and the psychologist the spectre of a ritual, an ancient ceremony. According to this explanation Hamid was sacrificed. His only solace was that he did not know it.

The work of the educational psychologist can be frustrating, confusing and stressful. Sometimes she has to find a way of simply keeping going. Human situations and human problems are inherently messy. The situations where a child is, or is likely to be, or is threatened with being, permanently excluded from school are difficult, stressful and messy human situations.

Somehow the psychologist and other workers have to find a way of understanding what is going on. They have to find ways to control their feelings and remain calm and detached. It is difficult to be calm and detached when, inside, one is both seething and anxious. They have to find ways to remain sensitive to the needs of others yet assertive and inquiring whilst remaining unsure themselves. They must remain flexible in their thinking and yet ready to say something that makes sense. They must remain hopeful and keep wanting to come to work. They must develop the skills of successfully dealing with the most stressful aspects of work. I have found that familiar traditional epistemologies and methods of science sometimes do not always help in these ambitious aims. Sometimes consideration of more-esoteric agencies of perception, feeling, understanding and authorisation can help.

Jaynes describes scientific communities propelled forward by partisan fervour. In them we are unable to see the origins of our behaviour and we are unable to avoid the auguries of science. I would add that we are unable to learn from our experiences when we fail to understand them. Our unbending subscription to familiar and traditional methods of scientific inquiry leads to blind affiliation to *a sort of science*. The human being is not a finished product, as Jaynes notes:

“We, at the end of the second millennium AD, are still in a sense deep in this transition to a new mentality. And all about us lie the remnants of our recent bicameral past. We have our houses of Gods which record our births, define us, marry us, and bury us, receive our confessions and intercede with the Gods to forgive our trespasses. Our laws are based upon values which without their divine pendancy would be empty and unenforceable. Our national mottoes and hymns of state are usually divine invocations. Our kings, presidents, judges, and officers begin their tenures with oaths to a now silent deities taken upon the writings of those who have last heard them” (p.317).

## **chapter eight: discussion**

For someone, like me, who doubts the value of 'a beginning, a middle and an end' in all things human a summative message will prove hard to find. Much of what I have written is based on personal experience in the work, both as a teacher and psychologist, involved with children who were at risk of exclusion, or who were permanently excluded from school. I have necessarily decided to represent my many encounters with the lives of children excluded in the form of fictional stories, borrowing from a method described by Clough (2002). My review of research based on what I have called familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies was not exhaustive but I think I have explained why: such research does little or nothing to change matters for the quite specific segments of the English school population who face exclusion. I have addressed the first half of the first research question.

I have searched for alternative ways of understanding. I have applied lessons drawing on the works of four philosophers - Bion (1961), Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009), Dawkins (1976, 2007) and Jaynes (1976). I hope the reader has found my applications interesting. I admit that their applicability to the matter of school exclusion has been exploratory, speculative and at times indulgent. One reader asked me to identify a reasoning argument that links these four philosophers to my area of study, asking why I chose those particular philosophers? Three of them are male and white, moved by the positivist tradition of scientific inquiry, whilst the fourth (Bion) is a male, white psychotherapist. The four make an unusual collection. I confess to a conflict that will be obvious to others: I based my thesis on the works of philosophers, three of whom rely on epistemologies and methodologies that I spent a whole chapter decrying. That may prove to be a conflict that I am unable to resolve. In this chapter I justify my use of fictional

stories. I try to pinpoint lessons that I have learnt for the benefit of my colleagues in the field of education. Finally, I explain why I feel better - not about the situation regarding school exclusion but about my role in the matter, about my doubts about knowing what is going on? Ostensibly I have worked as a paid agent in many scenes of this complex social play called school life. But I have also become a critical observer of a recurring, distasteful social phenomenon. Because of this, feelings and emotions have stalked not just my years of my work but this thesis also. I discuss emotion again at the end of this chapter.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- (i) "Something is (still) rotten in the state of Denmark"
- (ii) what have I learnt?
- (iii) the limitations of familiar and traditional methods of inquiry
- (iv) the need for a school exclusion review officer
- (v) suggestions for future research
- (vi) the content and structure of this thesis and the process of writing it
- (vii) Yardley's evaluation criteria
- (viii) my answers to the research questions
- (ix) a metaphorical finale

(i) **"Something is (still) rotten in the state of Denmark"**

I begin by echoing a previously-expressed lament: the slightly-amended words of Marcellus (Shakespeare, 1599-1602) still ring true. The stories of Adam (chapter three), Laura (chapter five), Thomas (chapter six) and Hamid (chapter seven), fictitious though they are, represent my attempt to capture the realities of school exclusion for many children in England today. Little or

nothing has changed since I started formulating this thesis ten years ago. No two fictitious stories are the same. The stories offer hope and also echo despair.

The view that permanent exclusion from school is necessary, justified and morally acceptable hails from a particular perspective. In this thesis I have called those excluded the 'rejected beans' (this thesis, ch3iv). Admittedly, the situation surrounding the child-to-be-excluded is fraught, messy, uncertain and poorly understood - we are but simple creatures and the institution of modern schooling takes place in complex places. But this thesis cites research that shows that at the 'output' end of the school exclusion machine distasteful patterns of expediency, injustice, impatience and prejudice against certain character types occur. Such patterns - which resonate with my own experience in the work - reveal the fingerprints of 'false positives' (this thesis, ch3v). These recurring patterns suggest that something in some children is being sacrificed at the expense of retaining something in the way our schools and society operate. From a perspective that values fairness, openness, accountability and cost, I have argued that reason is being sacrificed to uphold a *status quo* that remains precious yet undefined, relevant but unaccountable. We who commit or are involved in these serial acts of social injustice - perpetrating avoidable permanent exclusion from school on vulnerable children - do so beyond accountability, justice and logic. As a witness to these events, do I still feel the same sense of outrage that I did when I began writing this thesis? Very much so. I necessarily search for reason where reason is absent. In this thesis I have tried to balance my search for reason with my search for personal therapy.

**(ii) what have I learnt?**



The problems facing children who are permanently excluded from school, those persuaded to leave and those who simply give up the ghost, and what happens to them once they have left, are well documented. Typically they are reported at the distal end of the school exclusion machine (Berridge *et al*, 2001; Children's Commissioner, 2014; Kendall *et al*, 2002; Kendall *et al* 2017). Others have laid bare the story at the proximal end - Callwood (2013), Oakley (2015) and Pomerantz (2008), to name but three. I have highlighted the disjoint between the distal form of 'knowing' - that usually relies on an epistemology and methodology that I have described as familiar and traditional - and the reality of the proximal event as it unfolds around the child *right there in front of us* in the school. I highlight this disjoint once again below.

First I pause to make an observation for which I will use a metaphor. Someone is still throwing children into a fast-moving river. We who work in education are collecting hard data from the recovered bodies but we do not seem able to go upriver to find out what is going on there. Who is throwing these children in the water, why and how do we stop them? And who decides who is thrown in and who is not?

In this thesis I have addressed the 'who' and 'why' by exploring alternative perspectives on the matter. I admit that I have done this in crude comparison to the more orthodox research. As a form of instruction, I have located the 'who' and 'why' in new places. Applying lessons from Darwin ([1859] 1985; [1874] 2009) I implicated the dominant subspecies as the 'they' who act, to *kill or be killed*, the 'they' who *struggles to survive*; and the 'they' who punish the child who has failed to *be successful (or attractive)* and who then becomes extinct from the habitat of his school. Applying lessons from Dawkins (1976, 2007) I implicated unrecognised, personal beliefs as a motivating feature residing inside the excluding 'who'.

I pose the notion here that those people who continue to believe in the rationality of the school exclusion argument are possibly the same people who continue to believe that familiar and traditional forms of inquiry will adequately ensure future improvements in this complex social matter. I find little evidence to support this anthropomorphic hyperbole (this thesis, ch4v). Applying lessons from Bion (*ibid*) I implicated the 'who' an amorphous, unconscious body of key adults who come together as a group fuelled by the basic assumption mentality of fight or flight (*baF*) to enact the violence of school exclusion on a child whose behaviour poses a threat to school group. Why do they do this? Because they are acting irrationally as a primitive group. But this group, Bion suggests, does not know itself as a group - it was not formally appointed and it bears no accountability for its actions. Applying lessons from Jaynes (*ibid*) I considered the 'who' to be the person or persons imbued by an ancient, anthropological imperative. These stewards of an unseen God, who faded from memory 4,000 years ago, are impelled onwards in their act of punishment by an ancient and primitive directive. Thus they carry out His sacrificial work. Why do they do this? Because they are ignorant of, and necessarily succumb to, the legacy of their bicameral origins - as did the educational psychologist in the fictional story of Hamid.

In retrospect I can see that I hold expressed opinions, that read something like this:

- (i) we do not really know why, as a society, we continue to socially exclude people, this includes permanently excluding from our schools, *at a regular rate*, vulnerable and sometimes-needful children;

(ii) in response to this lack of knowing we follow tradition, uphold the *status quo* and continue to invest our hopes in familiar and traditional forms of inquiry, with their associated problem-mapping epistemologies; paying but fleeting attention to the fiction of future institutional accountability.

The forms of inquiry alluded to in (ii) neither address the problem (of why are children still being thrown into the river and by whom?) nor do they help us understand why we continue to separate, lose and exclude the weak, vulnerable and desperate children, noted in (i). I have cast doubt upon the value of these forms of social scientific inquiry and I have embarked upon a search for alternative forms of knowing that will reveal the secrets of our, essentially neurotic, behaviour. Even if my arguments are weak, the two points I raise ((i) and (ii)) deserve investigation. I return for one final time to exposing the impotence of familiar and traditional forms of social science inquiry, as this is a central theme of my arguments. Before one final tour of inquiry lament I need to make some important points.

I have not entirely established the case that permanent exclusion from school is, in some cases, unnecessary, avoidable and therefore pernicious. My work leads me to presume that this is the case. My exploration of the numbers fiasco is itself energising but it does not provide any evidence of the case. I presume the case is valid, I have stated the case, I then went on to explore other 'ways of knowing' but the 'avoidable and pernicious' part of my argument was then put to one side.

But how do we prevent unnecessary, avoidable and arguably-pernicious acts of permanent exclusion from occurring? Below I argue the need for permanent exclusion review officers who

might become involved in school exclusions and play a central observing/ monitoring/ challenging role. But first more words of doubt. I am immediately reminded of the quote from Jaynes: “We .. live in a buzzing cloud of whys and wherefores ..” (*ibid*, p.402; this thesis, ch7ii) and the caution of Kingsmill: “We will not endeavour to fix the destiny of kingdoms ..” (*ibid*, p.7; this thesis, ch1vii). I have not read or heard of many theorists or practitioners giving air to the doubts I express in this thesis. I may not be speaking to receptive minds. How can I justify what I have written?

My object has been to describe things as a prelude to more logical and humanistic thinking about a complex problem area. In *The voyage of the Beagle* Darwin ([1845] 1892) described what he saw as he explored the lands and seas of South America and beyond. In the early 1830s he was not ready to describe (or the world was not ready to accept) a mechanism that explained species diversity and species extinction. In a way, this thesis is my journal. It invites the reader to consider the possibility that, as human beings, we do not know why we do what we do - and this especially when it comes to identifying, measuring, separating and excluding people. My thesis challenges the orthodoxy of social science inquiry. It offers the opportunity to recognise the impact and the influence of the group on human behaviour, in particular Bion’s *baF*. It gives words to the idea that primitive mechanisms, such as evolutionary forces, and archaic mores, such as Jaynes’ general bicameral paradigm, are at work all around us, silently shaping and guiding our behaviour and what we feel to be *our* own decisions.

### **(iii) the limitations of familiar and traditional methods of inquiry**

In chapter three I reviewed studies that exposed these problems. I found issue with familiar and traditional epistemologies that underpin most research in this area. This is a type of research

that succeeds in identifying the problems but which offers nothing that will change the situation. In closing this argument, I cite two pieces of research that highlight the disjoint.

Noguera (2003) studied forms of punishment as witnessed in schools, prison and society in the USA. He reviewed the area and found that children in schools are disciplined because the schools are unable to meet predictable human needs. Noguera found that schools have a preoccupation with control, noting that:

“Disciplinary practices in schools often bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society. Typically, schools rely on some form of exclusion or ostracism to control the behaviour of students” (p.342).

I am immediately reminded of Foucault (1977): “The modern rituals of execution attest to this double process: the disappearance of the spectacle and the elimination of pain” (p.11). I have discussed this in chapter five and will only repeat here that permanent exclusions from schools are carefully staged social events. The excluded child, once gone from the school, will not return, as recent government guidance makes clear (this thesis, ch3ii). Once departed, his pain and suffering are not witnessed by the children - but surely they must know?

Noguera describes the social basis for children's good behaviour in schools, a 'what's in it for me?' compact that fits with what Smith (1979) described (this thesis, ch5ii). Only the children who are *not* receiving the benefits of what schools can offer might wish to challenge this compact. To break this cycle of disadvantage and punishment in schools – a cycle reflected in the economic market, in prisons and in society in general – Noguera believes that we should revisit the purposes of education (*ibid*, p.344). He closes his resume with an unconvincing

finale, locating responsibility for improving this complex, societal problem with the better recruitment of educators:

“It sounds so simple because it is. Finding ways to produce safe and orderly schools need not compel us to turn schools into prisons or detention centres... what is needed ... is a recruitment of educators who will question the tendency to punish through exclusion and humiliation” (p.350).

Noguera and others rely on familiar and traditional tools of modern social scientific inquiry – observation, discussion, sorting, counting, comparing, model-making, hypothesis testing using quantitative analysis and probability statistics. Noguera binds these tools of logic and reason together by a passing reference to some fuzzily-specified moral theory. He argues that schools and society in general are overly punitive and unjustly so. At that point the needle becomes stuck and the words of the singer, Del Amitri, in his song, *Nothing ever happens*, describes the rest: “Nothing ever happens, nothing happens at all - the needle returns to the start of the song and we all sing along like before” (Del Amitri, 1998). The same forms of ineffectual inquiry are used over and over again and ranking, measuring and categorising are done again. Noguera does not stand alone - each new study gives birth to a brief moment of logic-inspired hope. But the systemic problems remain and those who pay the price continue to suffer.

The second study in this end series of lament is more recent research, on the surface more ambitious and it focused on English schools. Conducted on behalf of the Department of Education, 180 English schools and 11 volunteer local authorities were involved (DoE, 2013). It was a pilot programme run over a three year period targeting the progress of 43 Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 children educated out of mainstream school and in APs, including Pupil Referral Units

(PRU). The programme focussed on the effectiveness of the AP and PRU 'offer' in terms of addressing children's needs and ensuring good future outcomes for children who found themselves in their alternative educational situations. The unspoken 'view of the world' in this study is similar to the organisational psychology approach described by Miller (2004). Laudable though the study seems to be in terms of national coverage, the involvement of schools and the investment of research money into an area of education in dire need of reform, the report findings were uncomfortably grandiose and (intentionally, I suspect) positive in tone. And I fear they will have no effect on the future cohorts of 'rejected beans' (this thesis, ch3iv), the children erroneously maneuvered into alternative pathways of education with little choice of saying 'No'. I highlight some obvious deficiencies in this study here, noting first that permanent exclusions from English schools increased from 4950 to 6685 during the timescale of the pilot run.

The research leaned strongly on interpretation of questionnaire responses completed by lead teachers and members of schools' senior management teams, i.e. hardly an independent body. The voices of the target children and their parents remained silent: "Some lead teachers highlighted lack of parental engagement as a barrier to arranging (suitable APs)" (p. 58. The words in brackets were inserted by me to improve readability). The characteristics of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion were reduced to radar diagrams (p.32). The successes reported varied from efficient to grandiose: "... lead teachers reported that the arrangement process involved matching provision to pupil needs, resulting in 'tailored' provision" (p. 56). And: "The case study interviews confirmed the opportunity that APs can provide for students to break out

of a stereotypical label that they may have acquired. A different environment can support behaviour change”(p. 52).

I think that I have argued effectively that these familiar and traditional ‘ways of knowing’ about school exclusion that the above two studies embrace serve to change nothing. That is the first half of the answer to my first research question. My argument is that we find ourselves reading about ‘tailored provision’, ‘opportunity’ and ‘behaviour change’ in situations that others describe as unfair, illegal, parochial and needlessly punitive. Yes, there is still ‘something rotten’ in the state of English schools.

#### **(iv) the need for a permanent exclusion review officer**

The execution of a permanent exclusion of a child from school is depicted as discrete events in list 1 (this thesis, ch3iv). The list charts the exclusion of children from a school from a particular perspective, a perspective that upholds the *status quo* at local and national levels, a perspective that has a stranglehold on current research. This subscription to dogma limits the ability of social scientists to find new lines of inquiry that might inspire much-needed change. The many studies cited in this thesis bear testimony to the machine-like inevitability of permanent school exclusion. We work in schools where accepted forms of inquiry, discussion and decision-making have little or no effect in terms of on impacting upon the reality of the harmful effects of avoidable social exclusion. For the sake of upholding the *status quo* this disjoint must be preserved. But for the sake of those who suffer, this disjoint must be exposed and fixed. At the present time upholding the *status quo* is winning.



What is needed is a permanent exclusion review officer, someone with the authority to review each and every case of permanent school exclusion in their local authority. If such an officer had been appointed in a local authority like the unnamed one cited in chapter three, where I explored the mystery of the numbers of excluded children, she would only have to review 'less than four' cases per year – hardly a huge chore. The officer would become involved at step (v) of list 1. If she prevaricated she could do little to intervene because the decision, once made, is rarely reversed. To fulfil her office she would be charged with being proactive, monitoring the child's situation in school before the case had collapsed, discussing evidence trails, meeting with parents; and if necessary attending reviews. Ideally, she would be appointed following a vote made by her peers, as trade union officials are, because if she were appointed by the local authority hierarchy the shadow of political bias would fall. She would collect case notes and evidence trails over months and years and be in a position to lead 'cold case analysis' of the type that Clarke (2004) described. She would have the advisory power to promote change at the local level. In this way the madness of this particular version of social exclusion could be challenged.

#### **(v) selected lessons from theory – some questions and answers**

##### ***question 1:***

##### ***do 'Darwinian' tenets explain human behaviour?***

The tenets, *kill or be killed* and *survival of the fittest*, are attributed to Darwin ([1859] 1985), but likely have their origin in Spencer (Freeman, 1974). I have added *be successful (or attractive) or become extinct* as an application the later theory of Darwin ([1874] 2009) concerning sexual selection. Darwin's theories and the associated tenets are interesting due to their portability as

*idea metaphors*. Jaynes (*ibid*) describes all human language and human thinking as operationalised by the use of metaphors. Metaphors are not, according to Jaynes, simply linguistic devices. We also use metaphors in our thinking. Thus, I suggest, we are unable *not* to view the 'Darwinian' tenets as relevant to our situation as human beings living in complex human groups.

The link between metaphor as idea or written word or spoken language prior to influencing human behaviour can be direct and speedy. For example, schools changed from historic institutions of education-mainly to monetary-efficient, competing businesses in the space of a decade. A staging post for this process was the Local Government Act of 1996 (Levacic, 1998), which brought with it a redefinition of the social purpose of schools. Questions, such as *which type of child should be offered which type of curriculum?* were once again illuminated (see also Elkin, 1944). The idea metaphor became formalised as a written metaphor when it found its way into government literature (DfE, 2016, p.37). From there it influenced the behaviour of people in society with the power of the 'Darwinian' tenets as described in chapter five. For example, fifteen years ago Jones saw an intentional purpose of government in shifting public opinion from recognising children's behaviour difficulties as different from SEN by the subtle bending of words in government reports (Jones, 2003). Previously Warnock (1978) described children's behaviour difficulties as a special educational need. But the impact of Warnock ran its course. A generation later Norwich and Eaton (2015) note: "A behaviour problem or difficulty itself is no longer seen as a (special educational need)" (p.126). What begins as an idea, becomes a talking point, then a written object and then provides the authorisation to act differently. Market forces would then apply, requiring schools to comply. According to my brief

resume the timescale from thought metaphor to idea metaphor to a conditioned behaviour takes about thirty years - in a democracy.

**question 2:**

***are we even asking the right questions?***

On the one hand there is a slowly-gathering tide of permanent exclusions. On the other there is a vast sea of impressionable young minds who watch the spectacle of social exclusion unfold. What do they make of our adult penchant with finding and dealing with the 'deviants' in our schools? Will they be unaffected by the intolerance, the unfairness, the social violence and the dogma of avoidable permanent exclusion? One of my early lecturers in social science at Bradford University, circa 1974, published a paper entitled, *When does education become indoctrination?* Try as I might, I cannot find the original article but I recall its central message quite clearly: when the educational experience offered to the child fails to leave space for the child to think for themselves, to question what is offered, to doubt, to disagree and to choose differently then education becomes a form of indoctrination. We must ask: are we indoctrinating our children to accept the spectacle of formal social exclusion from school - and its threat - on an almost daily basis? Are teaching them that the ends justify the means? What is the question that permanent exclusion from school is the answer to?

**question 3:**

***do Bion's basic assumptions, in particular fight/flight behaviour, add to our understanding of the situation of the child at risk of exclusion from school?***

I found Bion (*ibid*) to be a refreshing, relevant read. The fictional story of Thomas invites a Bion-esque interpretation. The basic assumption mentality of fight/flight (*baF*) was revealed in

the group behaviour of staff at school who wanted Thomas to leave school and be educated 'elsewhere'. Bion observed fight/flight behaviour in the patient groups that he worked with. Bion also suggests this and other basic assumption mentalities can be observed in the behaviour of everyday institutional groups beyond neurotic patient groups, perhaps even in the behaviour of societies and nations (*ibid*, p.22, p.112, p.113, pp. 156-158). I found it therapeutic to apply Bion's interpretations to my own work as an educational psychologist. I conjured a a nebulous group of excluding adults who come together in basic assumption netherspace to express *baF* mentality - to push the next child onto the conveyor belt of school exclusions. Before discussing this further I pause to widen out my application of behaviour inspired by basic assumption mentality.

The most dubious acts of socially-condoned human violence occur when punitive decisions are made by a group far removed from the individual, group or race that suffers the outcome of those decisions. For example, the decision to drop bombs on Syria in 2016 was made by many governments situated in safe buildings thousands of miles from Syria. This can be interpreted as a political act with strong *baF* overtones. Similarly the decisions to persuade parents to agree to the move of their child from a mainstream school to an AP system, a practice that occurs in many local authorities in England, is made by groups of people who sit on a panel that is powerful, remote and which does not have to justify its decisions. I once sat on such a panel. Members of that group did not usually know the children referred to the panel. In my experience, panel members did not routinely visit the AP colleges. They did not typically look at the long term outcomes for the children they decided for. Once the students left the AP college they were forgotten. The other side of covert acts of punishment is the need to make them

invisible (Foucault, 1975, p.11). The decision to report 'massaged-down' data about the numbers of children permanently excluded from English schools in government tables can be seen for what it is - an attempt to conceal society's penchant for punishment and a desperate effort to uphold the *status quo* at all costs.

Are these examples of fight/flight behaviour that Bion writes of? Are they not? The argument that official school exclusions and informal persuasions to leave mainstream school are necessary, logical, rational, reasonable and just has its counter-argument. Under close review - and in retrospect - the actions of schools, Parliament and the Department for Education can be seen to be expensive, illogical, irrational, unreasonable and unjust - as the studies cited in chapter three make clear. In the absence of reason the decisions to exclude might be better understood as deriving from primitive inspirations, from basic assumption mentality.

A consideration of alternative interpretations of human behaviour has allowed me to continue working in stressful situations and to organise my thoughts, energies and decisions more appropriately. I have found immediate value in interpreting the words, emotions and behaviour of people in stressful meetings in schools - and in the office - by reflecting on Bion's basic assumption hypotheses. I urge others to read Bion (*ibid*) and consider the value of such mental activities. Bion offers us tools to release the mind and allow it to think in different ways. The human vectors Bion describes cannot be proved to be existential. Their value relies upon interpretation. But so does our reliance on familiar and traditional methods of social inquiry.

**question 4:**

***can basic assumption mentality explain behaviour of senior people in the local authority?***

In this thesis I have made this argument. In brief the people who decide to exclude a child act in unison as a group that does not recognise itself as a group. This group of local authority people come together not necessarily existentially but sometimes so, but unconsciously as a non-appointed group whose behaviour is motivated by the basic assumption, *baF* that Bion describes. They direct maximum *fight* behaviour on the child who stands as the enemy of the school, its ethos, indeed its very existence. The group does not moderate its actions by reference to the outside world and therefore it does not learn from its behaviour. It emerges, acts and then disappears back into the local authority aether. This hypothesis cannot be proved. It relies on interpretation.

I insert a note of caution. Not all decisions made to permanently exclude children from school should be interpreted in this way. The fictional story of John, in chapter four, might be considered to be a case in point. In the fictional story of Thomas, in chapter six, the long-term outcome was arguably 'good' (good for Thomas? good for his mother? good for school? - take your pick) and the impact of *baF* upon him was moderated by the actions of the people who attended the emergency meeting. I see two epistemologies at work here, which hail from different philosophical dimensions. They coexist and both remain possible 'ways of knowing'. But in the course of our work only familiar and traditional 'ways of knowing' are given a voice. Sometimes, to truly understand what is happening when a school exclusion is made, a Darwinist or Bionesian or Jaynesian perspective is required. Somehow the incredible needs to be made credible. But I recognise that evidence for the predictive power of a Darwinist, Bionesian or Jaynesian hypothesis will be difficult to find. But I see a major difficulty in our ability to question our own behaviour, especially our group behaviour. Human behaviour is

messy and unpredictable. Sometimes it needs to be understood using a different epistemological framework. As Bion himself noted (p.113) further work needs to be done to demonstrate the prevalence of basic assumption activity in wider human groups.

**question 5:**

***where does the authorisation that determines our next action come from – is it a legacy of our ancestral bicameral mind?***

I would ask: can the general bicameral paradigm, as described earlier (this thesis, ch7iv) be witnessed in modern society and in schools when school exclusion occurs? This is again a matter of interpretation. In chapter seven I demonstrated how the educational psychologist involved with Hamid saw himself as a self-directed, logical and a detached professional. From the perspective of general bicameral paradigm the same educational psychologist could be seen as a puppet whose actions were predicated and shaped by his unconscious subscription to an ancient bicameral paradigm. Jaynes' hypotheses – and in particular the bicameral paradigm - are not mainstream in contemporary circles of interpretive psychology. But should they be? Are we only too happy to continue to delude ourselves about the rationality and reasonableness of our behaviour?

Consider this example taken from everyday school life: the child is *expected* to come to school every school day, without fail, dressed in a certain way, arriving at a predetermined time, prepared and ready to learn. This can be interpreted as the first phase of the general bicameral paradigm, i.e. a manifestation of the collective cognitive imperative that Jaynes describes (*ibid*, p.324). Secondly the child is *conditioned* into the required set of behaviours – “Stop talking, sit down, keep still and listen!” - this can be interpreted as the induction phase of possession that

our teachers are well practised in. Such conditioning occurs regularly during the 15,000 hours of compulsory school teaching that children in England receive (Rutter *et al*, 1979). Thirdly, the children are *cognitively engaged* in the teaching and learning compact. Interpreted another way they are placed into *a trance* and if they resist actively enough they are given a sanction, a negative reinforcement. Finally, once the majority of children are in the trance - because there is always one who is not - the teacher gives voice to an *archaic form of authorisation*. Permit me to be the teacher for a moment: “I will stand here and speak mathematics for twenty minutes and mathematics will illuminate your brain. You will then sit for another twenty minutes and do a whole page of sums – neatly, correctly and without dispute ..” If I felt mischievous I might then add: “.. showing full subservience to the ancient ritual called ‘decimals’. I will then elevate in joy the faithful acolytes who *achieved*”.

I must confess that my mischief above has real origins for me. In my youth, working as a teacher in an SEBD school in the late 1970s, one member of that small class put his hand up and asked: “Why are we doing logarithms, Mr Forde - will we ever use them in our working life?” Jan was a pleasant, intelligent, inquiring soul who was considered to be academically able. I explained why, saying something about developing maths skills, possible future exams and dealing with the mathematical puzzles that life throws up. Astutely Jan said: “Oh! I see. We are doing them for you, Mr Forde, so that you can feel like you are being a teacher”.

In the main children in school obey the adults. But are we really teaching them just the National Curriculum? As one of my lecturers once said in a seminar during my doctoral studies: “When the teacher speaks 'mathematics' does 'mathematics' happen in thirty children's heads simultaneously – or is that just our social construction?” So, I ask: are we teaching our children



mathematics or are we asking them to subscribe to an ancient bicameral paradigm? I should confess to the reader that I really enjoyed my own school experiences. I absolutely *loved* mathematics and the discipline of decimals seemed so logical. Perhaps I was, in those days, an acolyte. Perhaps I have now become a cynic, one who doubts, one who dares to question the enactment of ancient bicameral paradigm?

A second example relevant to the profession is when the educational psychologist 'sees' a child 'for the purposes of assessment'. I will describe the social construction of this event, which applies to the work of the psychologist in English schools. The collective cognitive imperative is established when the child naturally (or unnaturally?) agrees to sit with the psychologist, someone he has never met before, someone who has turned up unexpectedly on the day. This unusual behavioural acquiescence is part of the culture of our schools. The induction phase commences with the words the psychologist uses to 'buy' the child's initial compliance. Reece (2008) used the phrase 'buying the first few minutes' during INSET training he delivered some years ago and the idea lives with me. The trance phase occurs as the child becomes absorbed in the unusual words, the close attention of the psychologist and perhaps the novelty of the activities brought. Who would not want their personal views sourced and listened to? Who would not want to solve some block puzzles? Some children, as we know, resist the trance and ask to leave - but not many. The possession phase, within which the archaic form of authorisation is achieved, when the psychologist draws from the child inculcated meaningful work. He is now in a trance and his compliance is his silent agreement to the psychologist going forward to represent him in a future school meeting. Does an ancient bicameral paradigm

describe this unusual behavioural compact between the psychologist and the child better than any other explanation?

**question 6:**

***where does authorisation to permanently exclude children from school come from?***

The working life of an educational psychologist is filled with decision-making. And it is filled with due regard to authorisation. Where does the authorisation to permanently exclude a child from school come from? There is, in the Butler Report of 1944 (Elkin, 1944), a provision that permits the removal of a disruptive child from school in order to ensure the efficient delivery of education for the wider group. This is an historic form of authorisation relevant to English schools. This provision has stood the test of time and has been dutifully amended by government legislation over the intervening years. In bicameral tradition Butler is the Oracle at Delphi. Is it ridiculous to consider that, in order to achieve external authorisation to exclude a child, we rely on the voice or the printed word of the 'oracle' we accept?

Or is the familiar explanation better at locating the seat of authorisation? By this I mean the result of the often-brief, 'social experiment' whereby school, peer and family factors are held constant whilst a serious intervention is attempted to 'help the misbehaving child improve'. This experiment usually takes place *in situ* and *in camera*. Rarely are there external observers as schools are closed communities with high fences around. If these are genuine social experiments they are very poor ones, only sparsely informed by the rigors of social science. When long-term, outcome studies are made significant practical, ethical and justice issues are uncovered (Allan, 2006; Bagley *et al*, 2016; Berridge *et al*, 2001; Callwood 2013; Children's

Commissioner, 2104; and Thomas and Russell, 2009). Our authorisation to continue with this dogma is, at best, questionable, at worst culpable.

I feel like I have discovered something about the mystery of human behaviour. Beyond reason and our duty-bound engagement in the expected phenomenological dance of life we sometimes act like puppets engaged in primitive rituals of behaviour. At such times we become blind to ourselves. We fail to understand why we are doing what we are doing. A consequence is that we do not learn from our experiences. This is the message that I have woven into the fictional story of Hamid. There the psychologist was impelled forward, unconsciously so, by ancient mores. She was placed in a trance and authorised to tell Hamid that he needed to change schools.

### ***a reflection on the process of personal growth***

This thesis marks a journey of personal learning. I have depicted this diagrammatically, below. I am a divergent thinker, attuned to the movement of emotional vectors as these occur, are raised or perceived in the course of my work. This is a particular mindset that I recognise. Or I could argue, having recently found Damasio (1999), it is a state of preferred consciousness, a skill in attention control. Being involved in a school exclusion is a difficult part of the work of any educational psychologist. No doubt my colleagues have also felt impotent, confused, dismayed and angry at what they have witnessed, what they have been involved in, what they have been paid to observe yet not challenge. I find myself to be more broad-minded, flexible, forgiving and in control of my own thoughts when engaged in this difficult aspect of the work. I learnt to manage my emotions in stressful situations. I achieved this because I have found new

ways to understand both the emotions inside of me and embedded in the situations I was involved in.

In this thesis I have used emotion as a form of data but data of an unusual type - analogue data that exists within people, including me. The phenomenon of permanent school exclusion is neither a unitary nor stationary thing - its nature changes from place to place, from time period to time period. It, too, is represented in this thesis as analogue data. Government websites of school exclusion figures represent it digitally. To attempt to 'capture' the phenomenon of school exclusion and define it involves an arbitrary choices of what to put in and what to leave out. I have deployed the data of emotion because, in the direct work with vulnerable children, it always arrived at my door unexpectedly and could not be ignored. Too often powerful, unrecognised emotion is the elephant in the room that Stollard (2008) writes about: "Emotions are part of our humanity. Without them, society could easily become a sociopathic, thoughtless place where egocentrism would dominate and trust would be minimal" (p.17).

I drew a picture of my personal journey of learning. It begins with the emergence of a social problem. The problem relates to perennial human questions, such as 'how do we address the needs of the one versus the needs of the many?' And it echoes the questions asked by the artist, Paul Gauguin: 'What are we? What are we doing? and Where are we going?' I am the person in this picture-story facing the problem and the questions. Traditionally I make my choices, do my work and life goes on. But there are two of 'me' in this picture - one is an individual and one is a member of the social group. My responses to the problem - Maschi *et al* (2007) discuss them as what I think, feel and do - are determined differently by the group 'me' that is activated.

The social problem I have focussed on is permanent exclusion from school. I elevated this cause to conscious deliberation due to my life path. I deemed it a problem for the reasons given in chapter three. I have been absorbed by the question of 'What are we doing in our schools?' And: 'What is happening right now for this child? My work has brought me close to the matter many times and these experiences have impacted upon me personally at the emotional level. As time passed and I began to feel frustration at the familiar and traditional 'ways of knowing', which changed nothing for vulnerable children, I became more interested in the unseen vectors of group behaviour. At the group level of human behaviour the triad - thinking, feeling, doing - is once again invoked but differently so. It is more dominated by what 'we', the group feel. Thinking is relegated and doing is prescribed according to less-familiar dictates.

To understand the impact of the group on this second 'me' I applied alternative perspectives borrowed from Bion, Darwin and Dawkins. I did this to be creative, to unlock something that I found difficult to pinpoint or resolve. I have focussed on what is happening in English schools right now. The phenomenon of school exclusion shows no early signs of changing. What is happening now is that we are stuck in an epistemological loop and so the problem continues.

From a different angle, and considering an argument posed by Murray *et al* (1990), who forged links between the relationship, mood and creative and divergent thinking, I see that in my work as educational psychologist I cultivated a positive mood in order to keep working and to maintain my preferred thinking style. It is not always advantageous to express creative and divergent thoughts in stressful social situations.

I have touched upon society's penchant for social exclusion, mentioning but not doing enough justice to the work of Agamben (1995), Billington (2000, 2006), Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982) and Macintyre (2007). For some philosophers society is sick, regressive and mired in intractable problems. Disturbing patterns are revealed in the writings of Bion (*ibid*), Jaynes (*ibid*), Fort (1919), Schopenhauer (*ibid*) and Wells (1945). The illnesses of society manifest themselves in many ways, not least in the adulteration of social scientific inquiry, which Jaynes (*ibid*) describes and others (such as Burman, 2017) expose in detail. These illnesses are represented in the haunting spectres of social exclusion, which Agamben (*ibid*) and Foucault (1967, 1977, 1982) write about. I have not, however, forged an academic link between school exclusion in particular and social exclusion in general. I have not demonstrated that English society is sick. I have gone as far as expressing my concerns.

In writing this thesis I have learnt to think about school exclusion in different ways. My fear is that my colleagues are confined - in written word, spoken word, thought and deed - to a dogmatic subscription to what I have called familiar and traditional 'ways of knowing'. I would hope that my ambitious journey will provide new metaphors of thought of service to them in the course of their work.

What binds together the work of the four main philosophers that I have relied upon in this thesis? What summative lesson have I learnt from them? It is that, through appreciation of their ideas - which are new, buoyant and available - I have expanded my metaphorical mind-space (Jaynes, *ibid*, p. 55). I have been better able to work as an educational psychologist. To work as a professional close to yet another situation where future case outcome is uncertain requires the development of attention, perception and emotional skills. Yes, this comes in time

anyway, if one perseveres. But this personal development is interfered with by anomalies in the work situation. A recruitment crisis can affect a school or an educational psychology service or a local authority. A bad experience working in a school - or attending an appraisal meeting at work - can cause significant emotional upset. The psychologist has to find a way of keeping working and keeping growing. What I liked about the four philosophers I chose was that their hypotheses were available as idea metaphors.

#### **(v) suggestions for future research**

Mixed methods research might be undertaken to explore and compare the decision-making behaviour of the teacher working alone versus the teacher working in a group, where decisions made about children are formalised into action. Examples of human behaviour worthy of such study (and relevant to school exclusion) might include:

- who gets detention and why?
- who gets discussed in the staff briefing and why?
- who compiles the behaviour log?
- is fixed-term and permanent exclusion predicted by postal code?

The group dynamics described by Bion, Darwin and Jaynes could provide valuable templates of thought in pursuit of such a study. As Bion notes: “.. there are characteristics in the individual whose real significance cannot be understood unless it is realised that they are part of his equipment as a herd animal .. (p.133).

I once made an academic excursion into a related field. I read what are called *the Milgram experiments*. These studies explore the issue of how authorisation to commit a violent act is

activated by the individual and the institution (Burger *et al*, 2011; Fiske *et al*, 2004; Haslam *et al*, 2014). I am not aware of any similar experiments in relation to the phenomenon of school exclusion - perhaps it is time for these? We can expect institutional resistance to any efforts to open the matter up to inspection. Foucault's warning pertains: " .. the disappearance of the spectacle .. " (Foucault, 1977, p.11, this thesis, ch8iii). The issue of invisibility has its echoes in the more contemporary works of Berridge *et al* (2001): " .. unofficial exclusions continue to take place, though the scale of the problem is difficult, if not impossible, to determine .." (p.2). McNab *et al* (2007), who studied 'hard to reach' and vulnerable children, found the same: "The study was thwarted on a number of occasions by gatekeepers restricting access at much-needed information .." (p.146).

It would be instructive to explore the impact upon personal decision-making of the general bicameral paradigm. This paradigm serves as a model for understanding human decision-making in complex, social situations. It has been defined by Jaynes (*ibid*, pp. 323-326). It could be adapted to fit with typical school situations of the sort listed on the previous page and suitable research hypotheses formulated. As a descriptive example I applied the paradigm to the fictional story of Hamid in chapter seven. Precisely how such a study would be turned into an 'experiment' would require careful thought.

Jaynes (*ibid*) devotes a chapter of his book to the 'auguries of science', expressing fears that ancient social mores, that in the past gave rise to idolatry, religion and sectarianism, continue in the present to influence the project and trajectory of science (pp.433-446). According to this line of reasoning it is possible that what we choose to see as a subject for proper study in the field of education is a perception guided by preferred 'ways of knowing', i.e. the epistemology



we choose - or perhaps it is chosen for us? Historical and embedded prejudices about how we construe children, child development, schools and learning, subjects that Burman (2017) writes about, no doubt influence what we choose to put in and leave out of the school curriculum. I pause to ask again, precisely who is that 'we' that I have just referred to? Any future research into such matters should involve close inspection of primary works of philosophy in this century and the previous two centuries, works such as Hume [1739, 1740], Burke (1747) and Dewey ([1859-1952] 1997) to name but three. More recent and relevant texts include Damasio (1999), Gergen (2009) and Bakhtin (1981).

#### **(vi) the content and structure of this thesis and the process of writing it**

In this thesis I have used different tools and adopted a shifting focus. At one moment I have focussed on a word, a metaphor, a meme; and at another I have considered the *status quo* of English schools as if viewed dispassionately from above - like my colleagues I have spent time in hundreds of them. I have borrowed from the works of four unique philosophers. I have made a critique of what I have called familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. I have attempted to explore the void between the accepted 'ways of knowing' in modern forms of social scientific inquiry and the continuing prevalence of social exclusion in its many guises. Here I make some justification for my unorthodox approach.

#### ***relying on personal experience***

This thesis has relied heavily on my personal experience of working as a teacher and educational psychologist with children at risk of exclusion or actually permanently excluded from school. I discussed aspects of my life that gave rise to this thesis about which the reader might only guess. But personal experience may not translate easily to that of fellow

professionals. I decided to bring my experience to this thesis at a point where the emotional consequences of the work had increased and the promise of academic study was offered. Given the type of publications I have previously put my name to, this decision came as a surprise.

### ***relying on fictional stories as a way of representing children***

In this thesis I have relied on fictional stories about memorable characters based on a methodology described by Clough (*ibid*). Why did I represent children in this way? MacIntyre (2007) describes the contribution of the character in social history:

“A character is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them. He furnishes them with a cultural and moral ideal” (p.29).

Thus I raised the characters of Adam, Hamid, Thomas and Laura. I did this to focus the minds of those who might read this thesis. Having a strong visual brain I can 'see' the children described in my stories. No doubt they are an amalgam of memory traces, real children that I have met or read about along the way. My hope is that the reader can 'see' these characters also and will recognise my stories real children that they have worked with. Fictional stories are a literary device and the stories are not real, which raises questions about their value. Clough (*ibid*) deals with this point, citing Murray (1978). First there is an interpreter, which, as the writer of this thesis, I have been. I have made personal sense of a complex social phenomenon by using the medium of the written word. My fictional stories depict social bonds, social pressures and social understanding, all of which arise from my personal experiences and yet will echo in the minds of the readers. This requires the act of interpretation by the reader who: “.. questions the one who understands (i.e. the one who writes the story)” (p.95). The words in brackets were inserted by me to clarify meaning). Fictional stories raise memories, thoughts and questions, as

they were intended to. They are not intended to provide answers but to stir emotions, raise doubts and generate more questions. I have worked to ensure that my fictional stories will pass the 'Lolly' test (this thesis, ch1vi). I think that on balance they stand as a strength of the thesis.

### ***my critique of familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies***

In this thesis I have made a sharp critique of forms of inquiry based on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. In the work of the educational psychologist we often rely on numbers as sources of exact data on the phenomena we consider. We should only do so with extreme caution. Blind acceptance of a number datum leaves the user blind to many other sources of information. Is the number 1 or 0, i.e. was the child permanently excluded or was he not? Is the number of excluded in one local authority in one year 'less than four' as government tables indicate, giving rise to 5,800 children excluded nationally. Or is it 80 children locally and 116,000 children annually? Take your pick. Research that relies on familiar and traditional 'ways of knowing' and methodologising relies unduly on the valency of numbers. I have found that they leave the psychologist who would want to improve matters for the child they are working with in a desert of impotence. They provide clear answers to the question of 'how many ..?' provided definition, meaning and truth are prescribed but they do not tell the professional why the unpleasant numbers have accrued and what can be done to improve matters.

I do not critique positivist science from a position of ignorance. I am not new to familiar and traditional methods of social science inquiry. For many years my preferred mode in study has been the application of quantitative methodologies and their associated epistemologies. I am trained in the methods of factor analysis and discriminant analysis (Forde, 1987). I once designed my own version of Qsort methodology (Forde, 1997). I once wrote a Pascal computer

program based on factor analysis designed to interrogate the emic views of policemen and policewomen about the matter of stress in the police force (Brown *et al*, 1990). But these tools have helped me little in my efforts to understand the phenomenon of school exclusion. They did not help me get past the crucial question: if school exclusion is expensive, sometimes unreasonable and unfairly applied then why does it continue at the rate it does? So I turned sharply and looked in new directions so as to unlock my thinking. That I then enjoyed what I read and what I wrote is itself a personal triumph. It was like administering balm upon my fatigued mentality. I succeeded in finding a way to rekindle the fire my work with excluded children. My thinking had stalled because I became trapped in reading works of dire consequence. In reading Agamben (1995), the report of the Children's Commissioner (DfE, 2014), Foucault (1977), Sereny (1995) and Noguera (2003), one reads alone and suffers in private. I needed a boost. After reading Dawkins (2007) I saw a way through the tangle. I then wrote with speed and certainty, leaving many details and the matter of certainty until much later. One consequence of this is that, at times in this thesis, I may have sounded more sure of myself than I really am. Another consequence is that I have repeated and rehashed my arguments in my efforts to be clear.

### ***an excessive use of metaphor?***

This thesis has borrowed unapologetically from metaphor, a strategy that Jaynes (*ibid*) would consider unavoidable. I would argue that is a valuable tool of thought. When I studied BSc Psychology at Bradford University many ago I found myself - authorised, I see now, by the collective cognitive imperative that Jaynes writes about - running an electric current through the limbs of a frog that I had just killed in order to make its legs 'jump'. I was authorised to do

these things in pursuit of knowledge. I thus learnt about the tetonation of muscle as applies to frogs, reptiles, birds and mammals. Refreshing my memories via Wikipedia recently I note that: “tetanic contraction is a sustained muscle contraction evoked when the motor nerve that innervates a skeletal muscle emits action potentials at a very high rate ..” (Tetanic contraction – Wikipedia, accessed on 24 January 2018). This results in a much-stronger muscle contraction than would otherwise occur. I mention the source of my authorisation because a friend of mine at the time who attended the same course, Brian, found the activity unwantonly cruel.

Taking the idea of tetonation to be a metaphor for something else, I now wonder whether the events that lead to a child's permanent exclusion from school (this thesis, ch3iv) is an example of the tetonation of *supposed* logic? Consider these questions: does the first decision point – 'the child is deemed to misbehave' - once reached, provide a social and rational impetus for the second decision point to be reached – '.. he contravenes .. school .. policies'. And does the second decision point, once reached, serve to trigger the third – 'misbehaviour continues despite reasonable efforts' etc? And this until the point of tetonation, when the impetus to permanently exclude, having been innervated by so many events at just the right frequency, finally reaches tetonation such that it cannot be reversed? Or is it better to subscribe to familiar and traditional explanations?

***who or what gave me authorisation to write this thesis?***

Writing this thesis has been a wonderful experience. New and enabling thoughts have emerged throughout the process and I have found a place to put them. Now, at the end of this writing, I can answer the question above. My parents, teachers and role models (some of them fictional!) imbued me with the mission to improve matters wherever necessary and possible. Innate

curiosity into the nature of human life drew me to the profession of educational psychology. An acute interest in social exclusion in all its forms developed within me. It was easy for me to see the plight of the potentially excluded child having been an outsider for most of my own life. I need one last push to write and this came in bursts. In one local authority where I once worked I was introduced to a boy who had been excluded in one form or another from over a dozen high schools. My line manager advised me to drop the case. I told him that could not, as I had met the child, his mother and staff at his school and agreed on a line of work. So he dropped me from the team (much to my relief). But a charge had been set. The second burst came when I sat briefly on the panel of the AP management board in one local authority many years ago. I read in the briefest one page summary about a child destined to leave his high school to join the AP system. The decision was made rather quickly, in retrospect I presume on the basis of expediency and sortilege (this thesis, ch7iv). I protested. Soon after, by mutual consent, I left that panel. The final burst came when I was invited, on the Master of Education course, to write a thesis about something that mattered to me. These three bursts are what gave me the permission to write.

#### **(vii) Yardley's evaluation criteria**

Yardley describes four measures that define good, qualitative research that I now apply to this thesis.

#### ***sensitivity to context***

I have been close to the phenomenon of school exclusion by virtue of many years of work as a teacher and educational psychologist. Along the way, I have read many research studies and a significant number of texts that focus on this subject and on social exclusion in general. I have

read local authority and government guidance. Much of what is written is work that relies on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. But, evidence shows, such research changes nothing so I turned to alternative sources for inspiration. My feeling was that there was something difficult to pin down, something difficult to articulate, perhaps even something that avoids being given words that was at work in the social phenomenon of school exclusion. I turned to the four primary philosophical works that this thesis stands upon. In doing so I have attempted to pursue what Yardley calls 'vertical generalisation', which is more applicable to a qualitative inquiry. I attempt to “.. link the particular to the abstract and to the work of others ..” (p.220). This demonstrates my sensitivity to the social context within which this thesis is set.

A thesis might seem more credible if it focussed on the experience of real children, real schools and a named local authority. But I dare not attempt that. It would not only have been insensitive, it would have been politically challenging, perhaps even occupational suicide - an outsider cannot fundamentally challenge the *status quo* of a closed system with impunity. There is a more pragmatic reason I chose to use fictional stories. I intended to apply the unexpected theories of Bion, Darwin and Jaynes to the situation of vulnerable children in school. How would I ever obtain the permission of a parent and a child to do this - send them a copy of Bion's *Experiences in groups*?

So I decided against seeking permission from the many children I had met who had actually been permanently excluded from school. I relied on fictional stories to represent the wealth of real stories that exist. I applied the 'Lolly test' to my stories (this thesis, ch1vi). I kept schools as anonymous entities. I have not identified any particular local authority in this research. Indeed,

I have worked as a teacher or psychologist in over a dozen local authorities in this country. This thesis has never been about identifying *those at fault*. The fault, I have argued, lies in our human reliance on familiar and traditional epistemologies, these restrictive 'ways of knowing' that pressage our failure to think in a different way. The fault lies in our innate nature as human beings, in the persuasions of anthropomorphic hyperbole. The fault lies in our not-so-dormant subscription to *kill or be killed*, our propensity to succumb to primitive, basic assumption behaviour; and our unconscious susceptibility to the influences of ancient mores, such as the general bicameral paradigm.

### ***commitment and rigour***

I have demonstrated prolonged engagement with the subject area. I met the first child who had been excluded from school 40 years ago and I have not yet met the last. But is this study rigorous enough? Is the type of data that I have used adequate to warrant the observations and comments that I have made? Important subjects such as morality, consciousness, the origins of our authorisation and the disputed progress of science have been touched upon and none thoroughly covered. Hopefully the reader will appreciate that my continuing commitment throughout has been to help the clients that I have been working with. Making sense of that work retrospectively came later. So I have not taken out my tape recorder and sought permission to record the stories of exclusion from the children or their parents. I have not followed up on a particularly challenging case one year later. I have not sought out the influential panel member and asked them to account for their decision to offer a child a place in an alternative provision. All events of permanent exclusion are difficult. Many of the decisions made along the way are compromised this way or that. In pursuing this area of study I have



necessarily relied on personal experience, a narrative approach, fictional stories and the injection of theory from four important writers. I think that the questions that my study raises are valid. The general approach I have used is a qualitative one. The data I have used includes the distillation of emotional affect. I have attempted the “.. detailed exploration of the interwoven aspects of the topics or processes studied ..” (Yardley, *ibid*, p.215). I think I have demonstrated commitment and rigour in my approach.

### ***transparency and coherence***

Are my descriptions and arguments clear and cogent enough? Have I applied enough rhetorical power to persuade the reader to question and perhaps doubt the verisimilitude of conclusions from research based on familiar and traditional epistemologies? Can I demonstrate that I have learned from my experiences, which is my second research question? Can I demonstrate that I have made available to my colleagues my learning in such a way that they, too, can benefit from their own experiences, which is the second part of my second research question?

I have adopted a systematic approach to this study, laid out in the introductory chapter. At the outset I likened this to moving through the architecture of a library building. I have drawn ideas from different sources and I have made their origins clear. I have applied my argument directly to the plight of children excluded from schools the work of the educational psychologists and the work of fellow professionals in the field, including teachers. I have, wherever possible, indicated lessons that might help my fellow educational psychologists. I have kept the pain and suffering of children who have been unjustly, permanently excluded from school, or persuaded to leave, or who have simply given up hope, at the centre of matters. Alongside this, I have kept a central argument - that current ‘ways of knowing’ seem to do no good in changing the

outcomes for vulnerable children. I have conceded that, in many cases, making a permanent exclusion from school is the only practical thing a school can do. But I have highlighted the injustices, unfairnesses and illogics of this continuing national and no doubt international phenomenon. I cannot supply accurate numbers of the children in England excluded, either formally or informally - and I think that nobody can - but I have made an attempt to devolve the numbers question to my personal experience. There is a reason for the mystery of the numbers and it is not my reason, although I have long been part of the exclusion equation by virtue of my work, my insight and my silence. I have questioned the verisimilitude of government statistics relating to the numbers of children excluded. I have - as many others have - highlighted the unfairness, suffering and stigmatisation of vulnerable children who are excluded for questionable reasons. This thesis highlights the intransigence of government, local authorities and schools in terms of making every single case of permanent school exclusion a proper and legitimate event that is subject to critical review. I have called for the need for a permanent exclusion review officer. But this thesis identifies that, above all else, the *status quo* will be upheld at all costs, which is itself a symptom of the distress that English society experiences. Almost all the research cited in this thesis raises major questions of social justice and the inability of anyone to change things.

### ***impact and importance***

Yardley (*ibid*) reminds us that: "The decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact and utility" (p.223). This will prove difficult criteria for me to meet. With the facility of the White Rose Network, which makes theses freely available to those who might want to read them - including teachers, parents and children - this thesis will be

widely available. It can be read by those in the profession of educational psychology - probably by people that I have worked with. A lot of what I have written is of value to the newly-qualified psychologist. I intend to write a paper drawn from this thesis and submit it to a peer reviewed journal in the near future. That should point other readers to the source thesis. But is this thesis important? I would argue that it is, in the sense that very few people in education probably ever consider looking at school exclusion in the ways I have examined it. If I have been unafraid to think the unthinkable, then perhaps so will they? Writing this thesis has had a big impact on me in my work as an educational psychologist, especially in stressful situations where school exclusion emerges as a possibility, I find myself more in control, more focussed, more available to my clients and more committed to extending my work on behalf of children at risk of permanent exclusion. Usually I have not revealed my thoughts to others present but they have proved vital to my continued subscription to the proof code when engaged in the more difficult aspects of the work. It has helped me to navigate through the messy business of human, group and institutional life.

#### **(viii) my answers the research questions**

##### ***research question 1***

*Can I demonstrate that 'familiar and traditional' forms of social science inquiry, when applied to the phenomenon of school exclusion, are largely ineffective in promoting systemic change; and that other forms of inquiry, based on less-orthodox 'ways of knowing', offer inspiration and value to the educational psychologist involved with children at risk of exclusion.*

##### ***research question 2***

*Can I demonstrate that I have learnt from my experience as an educational psychologist working with and studying children at risk of permanent exclusion from school; and make key lessons that I have learnt available to other educational psychologists?*

My answers to these research questions are necessarily entwined. My learning began with direct experience, working with many children at risk of permanent exclusion from school and those who had been so excluded. Such work required me to immerse myself in the life stories of vulnerable children. Top-most in my mind was the need to be effective in achieving the best outcome for the child whose case was involved with. This involved learning about problems, process and practicalities. It also involved personal learning of an emotional nature. Further down the line I found myself holding, for a brief time, a consultancy role on the AP panel in one local authority. This panel deliberated on the future route of education for KS4 students who were deemed 'to need it' (this thesis, ch2iii). The norm was for the student to leave mainstream high school and attend an AP college. Few other academic routes were found. I held misgivings about that occupation. Soon after, I embarked upon doctoral training and began to read more widely about school exclusion and other forms of social exclusion.

How can I demonstrate through this text that I have learnt from my experiences? To answer this question I can offer no better explanation than that offered by Damasio (1999) and the links he forges between emotion, learning, attention, the sense of self and the feeling of now. I have touched upon all of these areas in this thesis. Damasio states:

“The sense of self in the act of knowing an object is an infusion of *new* knowledge, continually created within the brain as long as “objects,” actually present or recalled, interact with the organism and cause it to change” (p.25, the word in italic is original).

It took years but I learnt to approach work that involved children at the risk of exclusion with less certainty, more confidence, open to new ideas, more ready to listen and less ready to judge. I learnt to predict what was coming next, outside of me and inside of me. Sometimes identifying the memplex helped (this thesis, ch5v). I learnt to bring previous case experience to bare on present case dilemmas. I explored new and alternative 'ways of knowing'. I learnt to expand my metaphorical mind-space, which enable me to recognise, locate and contain the powerful emotions that this stressful area of work brings.

My academic study of school exclusion led to a different form of learning. In this thesis I have made a critique of familiar and traditional forms of inquiry from certain perspectives. My critique has not been seminal - I wanted it to be effective. Others, I am becoming aware, have made better critiques (Gergen, *ibid*; Burman, *ibid*). At first I read a lot of articles, including re-reading the ones that I had written (Forde, 1977, 1987, 1997, 2007), and including Noguera (2003), Hayden (2006) and DoE, 2013. All these studies relied on familiar and traditional epistemologies and methodologies. But they did not take me very far and they did not, time reveals, promote change at the systemic level. I then read works that explore human activity from alternative perspectives. I studied the works of Bion, Darwin, Dawkins and Jaynes. From these inspirations I saw patterns, persuasions and forces that derive from our anthropoid origins, from the primitive groups that an earlier form of human was part of and that we still are part of; and from archaic forms of authorisations that persist in society today. I began to feel like I was exploring unknown territory, finding new places, new ways of knowing. But these places were not easy to locate or easy to describe. Have I described them enough to offer

inspiration and value to the educational psychologist involved with children at risk of exclusion?

I hope so.

If I have personally learnt something I should be able to explain it. I have arrived at this place:

the social forces that underlie the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school, the unseen vectors, are of the same nature as the forces and vectors that underlie all forms of institutionalised punishment in society, generation on generation, in this country and in others.

I have learnt to approach the many scenarios associated with the phenomenon of school exclusion with a more-compassionate, yet more-flexible and philosophical, mindset. And I have learnt to interpret and understand those situations from different, sometimes non-standard, perspectives. As a consequence I have become more able to work in difficult and uncertain scenarios. I have learnt how to manage my emotions. I have become clearer in my thinking and more focussed in my objectives and in my own decision-making activities. In respect of the latter I might add 'notwithstanding that those decisions might not have been my own'. Have I demonstrated that I have learnt? I think so.

My hope is that the fictional stories will serve to stir echoes in the minds of my colleagues in the profession and perhaps in other professions too. As mentioned, work that is likely to lead to school exclusion can be easily avoided by the psychologist. To create the right sort of emotional effect I decided to deploy realistic but fictional stories to locate the area of concern with the confused and vulnerable child who was facing school exclusion. Hopefully these stories will help my colleagues to begin to think again about, and associate more closely with, the child at risk of permanent exclusion. Hopefully I will have succeeded. I will have challenged some deeply-held beliefs about the sometimes inevitable but sometimes pernicious practice of school exclusion.

Perhaps others involved in this matter - the parents, the teachers, the senior managers at school and other local authority personnel - will begin to locate the child they are involved with on the ladder of exclusion (list 1, this thesis, ch3iv)? Perhaps some will spot the emergence of the school exclusion memplex as it is given words (this thesis, ch5v)? Perhaps they will recognise the *kill or be killed* flavour of the events taking place (this thesis, ch4iii)? Perhaps others will become sensitive to the subtle group pressures that influence their behaviour (this thesis, ch6ii)? Perhaps others will, for the first time, view themselves as anthropoidal puppets acting out a contemporary play that was written years before but persists in the form of the general bicameral paradigm (this thesis, ch7iv)?

In describing the works of Bion, Darwin, Dawkins and Jaynes, I have tried to bring relevant, different and interesting contributions to this difficult area of human interest, i.e. school exclusion but also societal exclusion. Hopefully the reader will have 'stuck with it'. I hope that I have demonstrated that the application of earlier theoretical frameworks to modern problems can serve to unlock previously-fixed perceptions, as Billington (2000) aptly demonstrated in the format of his work on school exclusion.

For the benefit of my colleagues in the profession I have attempted to identify some 'rules of the road', especially those educational psychologist new to the profession; but also to colleagues in allied professions. These are located throughout the thesis and include: list 1: the typical route of school exclusion (this thesis, ch3iv); list 2: problems associated with the KS4 system (this thesis, ch4vi); list 3: the memplex surrounding permanent exclusion from school (this thesis, ch5v). My hope is that I have captured and portrayed the subtle dynamics of doubt and emotion that reveal themselves when working in complex social situations in schools, in

the educational psychology service itself and in other local authority scenarios - particularly when those situations reveal our responsibility for children at risk of permanent exclusion from school and who have been excluded or persuaded to travel down some other educational pathway.

**(ix) a fictional finale**

My purpose in writing has been to unlock some of the mysteries surrounding the phenomenon of permanent exclusion from school. My purpose has been to equate - or settle - emotion with experience and rational inquiry. Every time I tried a different key to open a new door to a different 'way of knowing' many things happened: I failed to recognise the subtle prejudices that I hold and the unconscious assumptions that guided my steps through the doorway. I failed to locate my contribution within the much-filled sky of existing philosophical insight. I raised more questions than I answered. I expressed doubt, dismay and confusion yet offered precious little in the way of assurance, confirmation and certainty. But a synthesis of ideas should be attempted. I will do this in a way comfortable to me, i.e. with a fictional story.

In this final story a senior member of school staff is on a rung of the ladder (shown in list1, this thesis, ch3iv), considering excluding a child from the school in a situation that I have previously described as 'avoidable'. I also appear in this story, a visitor to the school, sat in the same room as the staff member, busy writing my discussion, musing out loud as I go.

The member of staff, in privately deliberating on his consideration of permanently excluding the child, sees himself as engaging in self-directed action. This is action that is logical, balanced and necessary from the point of view of the child concerned and the well-being and efficient



education of the school pupil population as a whole. The underlying epistemology, the 'way of knowing', that the member of staff unconsciously subscribes to, may as well be understood as the 'organisational psychology' approach described by Miller (*ibid*, this thesis, ch3iv). The member of staff believes himself to be an individual, acting in a self-directed way, as Gergen (*ibid*) describes: "(he muses in) .. a world that ultimately functions as the source of individual action. It is variously a world of symbols, experience, cognition, emotion, motives, and/ or dynamic processes .. The strong sense of a psychological center of action remains solid" (p.xx. The words in brackets were inserted by me to relate Gergen's words to my fictional story). The remained or this story goes thus, in the form of dialogue:

MStaff: I am highly trained and experienced. I am working in a good school. And I hold the good of all the children at the centre of my deliberations and actions. (I do not need to explain what I mean by 'good' because I know what I mean). I can see no way forward other than permanent exclusion. But I will confer with my colleagues. I will discuss the matter with the local authority exclusion officer. But unless something significant changes (EHC plan, PRU placement, managed transfer, home tuition, AP option, etc.) I cannot visualise anything but permanent exclusion.

Forde (musing to himself): Can school exclusion .. really be understood as the re-emergence of primitive Darwinian inspirations, *kill or be killed, survival of the fittest and be successful (or attractive) or become extinct?*

MStaff (who mistakenly believes that Forde is addressing him): Ridiculous. Darwinian tenets apply to complex life forms but humankind has moved beyond such primitive inspirations. We

no longer live in a world where people are killed, where races struggle to survive and where personal physical and mental beauty determine our future success and survival.

Forde: Hmm. Chapter five .. an unquestioning belief in the validity of the social norm of exclusion .. listens to, without objecting to, the memplex surrounding exclusion .. does not critically evaluate the disjoint between the practice of permanent exclusion .. manifest illogic, negative future outcomes and its continuance .. Hmm, he is blind to the effect this event will have on the minds of the onlooking, trusting pupil population.

MStaff: I am but a small cog in a large machine. Others, far more qualified than I, decide on school, local and government policy. Anyway, this is a one-off - the government website suggests that, nationally, exclusions are under control. And as for memplexes - the world is full of half-baked ones – I can't do anything about that. And I am too busy to undertake a 'cold case' analysis of the sort this chap, Clarke, suggested. Besides, the governors would not permit it. You forget, I am not making this permanent exclusion to *hurt* the other children – I am doing it to *help* them.

Forde: Hmm. Chapter six .. validity of the Bionique group on the behaviour of key personnel in the local authority .. Hmm .. the idea that a group of people, who do not see themselves as a group, coming together metaphysically, unconsciously .. to express basic assumption mentality? In doing so expressing *baF* in a severe form .. Hmm.

MStaff: That is just neo-Freudian psycho-babble. Perhaps there was a time in our anthropological past when the human group acted in the way Bion describes. But we have

advanced – as Darwin himself noted. All decisions by the social group to identify, hold to account and punish miscreants are made with due account paid to the laws, customs and moral/ religious values of the community. Our prisons are full of *guilty* people. Our PRUs are full of *naughty* children. Our mental hospitals are full of people who are *ill*. And, about the book you are holding - I have never heard of this Foucault chap.

Forde: Hmm. Chapter seven .. could it really be possible that we derive our authorisation from an ancient God, or his oracle, or his writings preserved on cuneiform tablets? Is the general bicameral paradigm a valid hypothesis? Do we sometimes act like puppets manipulated by little-understood, aptic neural structures .. the general bicameral paradigm?

MStaff: Mr Forde, you will have to go. What you are saying is bordering on ridiculous. We are a modern, sophisticated group of educators. We do not worship ancient Gods. Nobody comes to this school and gives voice to primitive articulations that originated from someone 'on high'. There are no idols in this school – either literally or metaphorically. And there are no cuneiform tablets. Every single thing I do, and every other senior member of staff does, we do on the basis of evidence, for good, human purpose. We act according to truth, within the limitations and the definitions of our work role. Good day to you.

Mr Forde leaves the school (carrying his thesis with him).

I am beginning to suspect that there is a reason why we - as individuals, as members of the many different groups of life, as educational psychologists, and as members of English society - depend upon familiar and traditional forms of inquiry and 'ways of knowing' and resist any

alternative forms of inquiry, any different 'ways of knowing'. I suspect that this is a matter with an emotional signature. Perhaps our emotional status is more fragile than we would care to think? What Damasio (*ibid*) calls our core consciousness does not just devote its energies to ensuring that we have air, gravity and a liveable air temperature - it also devotes its energies to ensuring that we are safe, that we are vital, that we have a social identity, that we can survive in the social group - and that we are in control of the things that occur in our lives. Here, at the end of my thesis, I find myself moved to the next question: what is it, in the nature of humankind, that prevents us from ascending over our primitive, anthropoidal, often-neurotic, emotionally-charged instincts?

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